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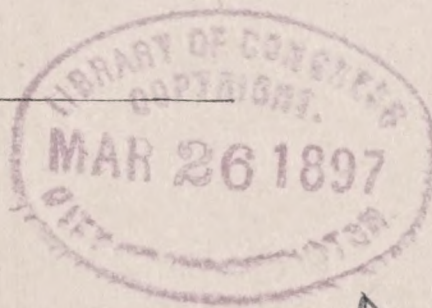
JACK PAYTON

AND HIS FRIENDS.

A BOOK IN FOUR PARTS.

BY

MRS. MAY ANDERSON HAWKINS.



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TO MY LOVING CHILDREN

THIS BOOK

IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED.

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JACK PAYTON'S PARTNER.

JACK PAYTON'S PARTNER.

CHAPTER I.

THE morning bell at Mrs. Moore's boarding-house rang out merrily. It always sounded just fifteen minutes before breakfast was served. This was to allow the ten young gentlemen who composed her list of boarders ample time to make the last needful preparations for the meal. No one was ever late in coming to breakfast at Mrs. Moore's. Her table was so excellent, her appointments so perfect, and the lady herself so anxious to please, that the students who were so fortunate as to secure a place in her home were careful never to annoy her by that late "dropping in" to meals so exasperating to careful housekeepers.

No one but students from Glyndon Academy were admitted into her household, and it was

an understood thing that the number thus accommodated were gentlemen. If one or two of coarser grain were sometimes taken in, unawares, the influence of the others was sufficient to hold them in check. Mrs. Moore's "boys" were a model set of boarders, yet happy and merry as heart could wish.

"Did you know Jack Payton has a partner?" cried John Rushton, linking arms with his special chum, Harry Norton.

"Well, Jack's rather young to carry on such a flourishing business. But who is the partner?"

"That is the mystery. He's a 'silent partner,' Payton says, and that's all we can get from him. He is so mysterious that some of us are awfully curious on the subject."

"His father, perhaps."

"Hardly. His family live in New Orleans. Yesterday I heard him tell Mr. Brown that he must consult his partner before he could give a reply to some business proposition just made. Mr. Brown was to call in an hour for his

answer. Jack couldn't hear from New Orleans in that time. It must be some one living in Glyndon."

"It couldn't be Mr. North, could it? He's got more money than he knows what to do with, and yet, you know, he's always planning to make more. Perhaps they've formed a partnership, and Jack's is only a branch store of the other."

"No, because old North is awfully snappy with Jack. He knows he is popular, and he snubs him at every turn."

"Perhaps that's only a blind."

"Hardly."

The last bell sounded, and breakfast ended the conversation.

A week later John Rushton walked briskly into Jack Payton's store. The proprietor was young, not over twenty-one, with a manly and pleasing face and bearing. These had won him hosts of friends during the year he had been a resident of Glyndon.

"A dozen cigarettes, please."

"Don't keep them."

Mr. Payton's voice corresponded with his face ; it inspired confidence.

"How is that? You had them last week." John Rushton's tone expressed both surprise and disappointment.

"Yes, but my partner objects to my handling them."

"Your partner must be a queer sort of fellow." His manner showed irritation. He wanted his cigarettes. Mr. Payton responded, pleasantly :

"Some people might so consider him. I respect and trust him entirely."

"But what is his objection to your selling cigarettes? Didn't you make a good thing out of them?"

"In a pecuniary sense, yes."

"Then where's the trouble?" Young Rushton was persistent.

Jack hesitated a moment, and then answered, pleasantly :

"He knows cigarette smoking is ruinous to health. He thinks I might as well sell intoxicants as tobacco." John looked curiously into

the recess where tobacco had been wont to repose.

“And you now sell the weed in no form?” His friend shook his head.

“But is not that quixotic, Payton? People will buy from others. Why not get the profits as well as old North.”

“I never argue with my partner. His head is level, and I can trust him. Besides, I now fully agree with him.”

“You didn’t at first?” curiosity in face and voice. Jack laughed.

“I wanted the profits. But young Norton smoked his first cigarette in this store. He had promised his mother never to touch one. I felt almost as guilty as though I myself had broken a vow.”

“I don’t see why.”

“The sight of my cigarettes tempted him. I kept a fine brand, you know, and arranged them to show well. He kindly says he has stopped patronizing any store but mine. If I had not had the cigarettes he might not have broken his promise. And the habit of using tobacco is bad, at best.”

Young Rushton looked thoughtful, but said, after a moment's pause:

"I fail to see your responsibility in the matter. I suppose you told your partner about Norton?"

Jack flushed, but before he could reply a customer claimed his attention.

The following week there was much excitement among Mrs. Moore's ten boarders at an announcement made by John Rushton at the dinner table:

"The Mill Company has bought out every merchant in Glyndon except Payton, and are going to open an immense 'commissary.' The operatives in the mill are to be paid in tickets, and these are to be exchanged for supplies at the 'commissary.'"

There were two large mills, a cotton and a woollen one, in Glyndon, in which hundreds of operatives were given employment. Hitherto their earnings had been spent impartially among the various stores of the place. Now they were to be poured into the coffers of the company owning the mills, at whose head stood

Mr. North. After the buzz of questions which this information elicited had partially subsided, Rushton added:

“The four merchants of Glyndon, Ward, Howard, Payne, and Howe, who are bought out, are to be employed at large salaries in the ‘commissary.’ Two wagons are to be run to take orders and deliver goods, and the idea seems to be to ruin Jack Payton. Every dollar he has in the world is invested in his store, and unless his partner has the extra cash, old North will run him down. The company intend to keep such a line of goods as was never seen in Glyndon before, and at such low figures Jack will not be able to compete.” Rushton paused, through lack of breath.

“Why is not Jack bought out and taken into the concern as well as the other merchants?”

It was Norton who put this question.

Rushton, who had begun an attack upon his neglected dinner, waited a moment before he replied.

“His clerk says Mr. North was shut up with Jack for an hour yesterday in Jack’s little

office. Payton got excited, and Dick heard him say : 'No, Mr. North, I'll be no party to such a scheme. It's a trick to swindle poor people out of their just earnings. You must count me out.'

" 'Then it means ruin to you, Mr. Payton,' said old North."

" 'All right,' says Jack, as cool as a soldier under fire. 'I'll take my chances. Honest money is what I want, and my partner will bear me out in my position.' At that old North laughed, and the interview closed."

"Old North is a regular shark."

"Payton is too honest to get along in this world."

"He'll have to give in in the end."

These and similar remarks came from around the table. Young Norton said, fire in his eyes and voice :

"Boys, let's stick to Jack, and let's work for him. We can, if we try, carry him every student in the Academy, and the families of the resident ones. Everybody knows old North is a cheat, and honest folks ought to give him the

cold shoulder. Let's work with a will for Jack!"

Had they been out-of-doors three lusty cheers would have greeted this outburst. As it was, nine voices cried, "Aye! aye!" in subdued excitement, and Rushton said:

"I can see through old North's scheme. He will sell low at first and starve Jack out. When things go as he wishes, he will sell at high figures and make immense profits. There will be no other store nearer than Westbrook, so people, especially the poorer classes and the mill hands, will be forced to get their supplies from the 'commissary.'"

"Your head is clear," said Charley Dixon, the wag of the party. "Why not be a merchant yourself, Rushton? A mind that can see through a sharp scheme so quickly ought not to be chained to a pulpit. Better change your program and offer your services to Mr. North. A year under his sharp practice would fit you to become a millionaire in no time. 'Birds of a feather,' you know."

This sally evoked a burst of laughter at

Rushton's expense. It was well known that he contemplated entering the ministry, and his gay companions chaffed him not a little upon the subject. To them it seemed absurd that such a splendid intellect and physique as he possessed should "go to the dogs," as they elegantly termed his choice of profession.

CHAPTER II.

IN the month that followed, Rushton's reading of Mr. North's plan was fully justified. The "commissary" was opened with much pomp. The mill hands were given a day's holiday, and a substantial dinner was served in the public park, at which cider and beer were freely distributed. Adroit marks of attention were paid those families who, it was feared, might prove loyal to Jack Payton, and no stone was left unturned that might make the new enterprise a success.

The Academy boys, some two hundred in number, were solid for Jack, but their influence did not reach so many families as they had hoped. The "commissary" carried such a varied and full line of goods that all of Glyndon's wants could be supplied as soon as felt. It was "such a convenience" to have all orders politely taken at the door, and promptly delivered, without further trouble, that few could withstand the temptation.

At first, prices were marvelously low. Some of the more prudent noticed, as the months crept by, that figures advanced, but they felt no alarm.

Jack Payton's store had few customers. The Academy boys made it merry with their presence and jokes, and all their pocket-money was freely spent with him; and a few of the best families still gave him their custom. But the outlook grew darker and darker for the young merchant, and a cloud began to settle over his frank face.

Long ago every Academy boy, led by Rush-ton, had abandoned the use of cigarettes. It was generally understood that in a certain little room in the "commissary" building a customer could always get a glass of cider or beer free of cost. This so outraged some of the leading spirits in the Academy that a society was formed, in which the "total abstinence pledge" was introduced. Every boy signed it, and, banding themselves into squads of three or four, they made the circuit of the town, exposing the Mill Company's tactics, and drumming boldly for Jack Payton.

The immediate result was to win five of the more prominent Christian families over to Jack, and to start a gentle ripple of indignation against Mr. North, who, it was well known, was the guiding spirit in the new enterprise.

About a week after this, as Rushton and Norton were standing in Payton's store one afternoon, Mr. North's handsome carriage was seen approaching.

"I do believe he's coming to interview you, Payton," cried Rushton, excitedly.

"Yes, the driver is pulling up. I say, Payton, if he makes overtures, do accept," said Norton, anxiously.

Jack smiled grimly.

"How about my partner?"

"If he is still obstinate, I'd let him run the shop himself, unless he's a millionaire, and can afford to keep you in idleness."

Mr. North entered with his usual pompous air, and nothing more was said.

The interview lasted a full half-hour. Mr. North came out of the cosy little office, looking angry and ugly, and Jack's face was stern and

pale as ashes. No one dared question him when he looked like that; but Rushton, wishing to express his sympathy, recklessly ordered, "Ten pounds of raisins, lard, soap, and things."

Payton's face relaxed into a fleeting smile, and he said, quietly: "It's a fight to the death now."

That night he closed his store early. His customers were so few that his clerk had been dismissed some time before, and he had only a small lad employed to clean the shop and run errands. His face still wore that stern, anxious expression as he locked his door and turned down the street.

"I'm off for a walk," he said to Charley Dixon and Norton, whom he met on the corner, coming towards his shop. He did not offer to turn back, nor ask them to accompany him; so they followed aimlessly in his wake.

"More cut up than I ever saw him," said Norton. "It's a burning shame for old North to push him to the wall like this. If I were in his place, I should almost be tempted to burn the mills."

“Or shoot old Sharpie some dark night.”

In their sympathy for Jack, the boys' ideas of right and wrong had become rather confused.

Jack's walk was a long one. He skirted the dark mill-pond, which, gloomy at all times, now looked to his depressed fancy as sombre as “the dank tarn of Auber.”

“I could almost fancy the ghouls were haunting it at this moment,” he thought, with a slight shiver. It had been raining almost incessantly for two weeks. The rain had now ceased, but the moon kept hiding behind banks of dark clouds, and this added to the weirdness of the scene.

“Halloo! What's that?”

He heard a rapid swish and dash of waters from the outer wall of the embankment upon which he was walking.

“Why, the dam is leaking, and the bank is breaking fast!”

He stopped, dizzy and unnerved for the moment from the rush of emotions the discovery evoked.

A broken dam, discovered too late, meant destruction to the mills and the "commissary"; and this meant prosperity to him. For one moment he was tempted to hide the startling fact, which had been made known to him by the purest chance, in his own heart; the next, he started into a run, saying, through his set teeth: "Thank God for my partner! He has saved me from worse than ruin to-night."

He almost ran into the arms of Dixon and Norton, who had been but a short distance behind him.

A few brief words explained the leak.

"Let it alone, Payton. The company deserve the loss. Don't you see, a broken dam means success and prosperity for you?"

Norton's voice was low and tense with subdued excitement.

"Aye! Just keep still. Come with us for a tramp. When we get back, it'll be too late to mend the break, and you'll be the only merchant in Glyndon," said Dixon.

Jack smiled, but shook his head: "My partner would never speak to me again should I do

such a thing. Right is right, boys, no matter who suffers. Come! help me sound the alarm," and he dashed off on a run.

The alarm-bell was sounded, Mr. North was quickly summoned, and gangs of men were set to work.

But toil proved useless. A dam many miles above Glyndon had broken, and the undue pressure was too much for the company's pond, already much fuller than usual.

Before morning both mills, several tenement-houses, and half the "commissary" building were swept away. When the rising sun peeped over the hill-tops, Jack Payton was proprietor of the only store in Glyndon.

The Academy boys were not slow in telling all they knew of Mr. North's plan to swindle people, and of his unsuccessful efforts to inveigle Jack into joining him. They also told of Payton's discovery of the broken dam, and of his haste in sounding the alarm. The fact also crept out that he had worked for hours by Mr. North's side, trying to save his enemy's property. Before the day was over he was the most popular citizen Glyndon had ever known.

He at once enlarged his stock of goods, purchased a horse and wagon, employed a clerk, and successfully met the demands of the hour. His prosperity was assured, for people knew he could be trusted, and the world likes to deal with such a man. The mills were rebuilt, but the "commissary" had had its day, and was not again opened.

One day, near the close of the school, Rushton accosted Jack with his most engaging manner: "I wish you would tell us who your partner is, Payton. What is his name, and where does he live? We're curious to meet the old fellow before we leave."

Jack laughed, pleasantly. A number of the students were present.

"I think you already know him, Rushton, and I hope he and you will never part company. My partner's name, boys, is CONSCIENCE."

A dead silence followed this announcement. Then Norton said, softly: "I thought as much."

This broke the spell, and three rousing cheers were given for Jack Payton and his trusty partner.

THE SEWANEE CLUB.

THE SEWANEE CLUB.

CHAPTER I.

THE club was now three months old. It had originated a little oddly.

A temperance lecturer had visited the beautiful town of Sewanee. He had made a great impression, for he was gifted, and thoroughly enthused with his subject.

The "University of the South," one of the finest colleges in the entire Southland, is nestled in this charming town among the Tennessee mountains.

The class of students who gather here from year to year are from the best families the South can boast. They are as sturdy, bright and manly a set as one could wish to see.

Opinions varied as to the lecture. Some of the students endorsed, while others condemned.

"It's all nonsense to suppose a fellow can't

touch a glass of wine without becoming a drunkard. It sickens me to hear such men talk."

Fred Holliday, as he thus spoke, kicked over a stool that stood in his path, and faced his companions like an animal at bay. He was the most popular student in the University. His opinion always carried weight.

"Why not try to offset the baneful influence of these fanatics by becoming a lecturer yourself?" said Charley Dixon, the wag of the party. "A fellow who can take as large a bumper of wine as you, without feeling it, could give practical, illustrated lectures to prove the fact that wine, in moderation, is a good thing."

"Hear! hear!" came in subdued, but animated, tones from the crowd of students around.

"You'd win over all the young ladies first thing," continued Dixon, soberly, with his eyes on Holliday. "You're such a good-looking chap, they'd endorse whatever you said, whether they understood it or not. Win the ladies and the men will follow. I'm fully convinced, Hol-

liday, that your true vocation is found. A lecturer you must be."

Laughter followed this speech. Holliday, while he stood well in his classes, was a total failure as an orator.

"I, for one, endorsed every word Mr. Stanley said," remarked John Rushton, firmly.

He was also popular, and his voice always won attention.

Quite a hubbub now arose in the room where the students were gathered. Every one seemed to have an opinion, and each wished to deliver it at the same moment.

As is often the case in colleges, two sets were formed. One was in favor of total abstinence, the other claimed that the use of wines and liquors, in moderation, was not only harmless, but beneficial.

These sets soon separated.

"I like a fellow of moderation, pluck, and backbone," said Holliday, the next time they met together. "Rushton and his crowd are a set of babies and cowards."

"Why not organize ourselves into a club?"

You've given us just the right name," cried Dixon. "The 'M. P. and B. Club' would sound unique, and give us distinction."

This proposition was hailed with cheers, and the club was duly organized.

It had now flourished for several months.

Some of the brightest students in the college were enthusiastic members. They had some graceful silver pins struck off, bearing the monogram of the club, and each one belonging to the order wore one.

There was much curiosity among those not initiated as to the meaning of the letters, but the secret was inviolate.

Many of Rushton's warmest friends were in this club. This fact left him quite lonely. He was still true to his principles, but his followers were not from the class of students to whom his heart clung.

"We're going to have a jolly time to-night, Rushton," cried Dixon, one Friday afternoon. "We meet in Holliday's room. Better join us."

He and Rushton were close friends, having

been chums while at school in Glyndon the previous year.

“Are outsiders admitted? Perhaps Holliday won’t want me.”

“Yes, he will. You belonged to our set, anyway, before you got cranky. Holliday likes you. He said to-day he wished he could help you have a good time. You look blue. Come over to-night. We’ll wake you up.”

“All right, I’ll be on hand,” replied Rushton, who, truth to tell, was a trifle homesick.

It was a pleasant sight that met him as he entered Holliday’s room a few hours later. Some of the choicest spirits in the University, full of fun and merriment, were gathered there.

It made Rushton’s heart glow to be among them.

Cards were soon brought out.

“No betting, you know,” said Holliday, carelessly. “Only parlor games. My sisters play when I’m home, and so does the governor. Take a hand?”

Rushton hesitated. But it seemed churlish to refuse, and what harm could there be in

joining in a game which the loveliest and sweetest girls in the land stamped with their approval? for Rushton had met Holliday's friends, and knew them to be wealthy, cultured and refined.

Harmless jokes and gay witticisms passed. All were merry, but nothing coarse, nothing bearing a breath of impurity, was heard.

Some among them smoked. Dixon was not of the number, and Rushton declined, when Holliday pushed a case containing a choice brand of cigarettes toward him.

"Charley and I swore off together," he said, in answer to some questions Holliday asked.

"Yes, we owe Jack Payton for that," responded Dixon, looking up from his cards. "I didn't like to own it then, but I knew cigarettes were hurting me all the time. My head is like another thing since I dropped them."

"How did you come to do it?" asked some one at his elbow.

"A fellow in Glyndon, where Rushton and I were at school, got hold of us. He was rather

quixotic, but splendid for all that. We were great chums. Something he said and did, it doesn't matter what, made us throw the weed over. And I'm glad I did. Every boy in the Academy swore off when we did."

Holliday whistled.

"Then the disease was contagious! Well, if all the Sewanee boys should swear off, some of her merchants would lose a good deal of money. I'm glad you didn't swear off on the wine, for I've got some first-rate claret for you."

"We did sign the pledge," said Dixon, lightly. "But it only held us while we were in Glyndon. Isn't that the way you understood it?" he asked, turning to Rushton.

"I have always felt bound by it, even though they did tell us it was only meant to hold us while in the Academy," Rushton responded.

"I hope you'll break through to-night, though," and Holliday reached into a wardrobe and brought out several bottles.

"My governor sent me this, and he knows what good wine is. He tells me if I never

drink anything but wine, and only the best of that, and use it in moderation, it cannot harm me. Won't you try a glass?"

Rushton declined, with thanks. It was never an easy thing to withstand Holliday, and this evening he pressed Rushton so closely that, had he been less firm in his convictions that safety lay only in total abstinence, he must have yielded.

"Well, I can't understand why you are afraid of one glass of wine. You're no milksop, and I'm sure you have sand sufficient to stop when you've had enough. I've no patience, myself, with a drunkard, nor with a fellow who can't take just enough and no more," and Holliday looked curiously into Rushton's strong, handsome face.

"If I should take you for my model, Holliday, I'm afraid I should be tipsy every time the bottle came around," said Dixon, laughing. Then seeing Rushton's look of surprise, he added: "He can take the stiffest bumper you ever saw, and still keep his head. Half what he tosses off, without feeling it, would make the rest of us as drunk as loons."

CHAPTER II.

“**I** CARRY a pretty steady head, it is true,” said Holliday ; “ but I’ve always been accustomed to the use of wine. There’s something in that.”

As he spoke he was pouring out the wine and handing it around. It certainly looked tempting, and for a fleeting moment Rushton almost wished he had never signed the pledge.

It was a pleasant and jovial evening, and none of those who were present drank enough to experience more than a passing feeling of gentle exhilaration. Charley Dixon was a trifle more merry and waggish than usual, and Holliday’s eyes had a sparkle not ordinarily seen, but Rushton was the only one who observed these signs.

“ Here’s three cheers for the ‘ M. P. and B. Club,’ ” cried Dixon, swinging his hat as they arose to separate.

The cheers were given in a spirited, but sub-

dued, tone. The club did not wish to attract undue attention.

“Rushton, you’re too good a fellow to be left out. Do join us! Hasn’t this been a jolly evening? We’re always having such times. You can sign the pledge over again when you go home.” It was Charley Dixon who thus spoke, as he linked his arm in that of his friend’s.

“It *has* been a pleasant evening, and the club is composed of some of the best fellows in the University,” admitted Rushton. “But I can’t join, Charley. I swore off forever when I was in Glyndon. Jack Payton and his trusty partner made a new man of me.”

“Jack was a brick,” said Dixon, warmly, “but a bit too straight-laced. Holliday is more to my mind.”

“Did you notice how many glasses of claret he drained? I was sure he’d lose his head, but he didn’t. His hand was as cool and steady as mine when he told me good-night.”

Dixon shrugged his shoulders. “It astonished us all at first. But we’re used to it now.

Ashton and Howe tried to imitate him the last time the club met. Both lost their heads. It was awfully funny to see them. They were no end silly," and he laughed quite boisterously.

Rushton looked shocked. "Were they really intoxicated?"

"As drunk as a corporal." Again he laughed. His friend eyed him sharply.

"Look here, Dixon, you've taken a trifle too much yourself," he said, very soberly.

"Not a drop," said Charley, earnestly. "I wouldn't, you know. My mother made me promise never to drink more than one glass. I never do."

"Yet you are excited and not quite yourself," urged Rushton.

"Pshaw! Just the least bit in the world exhilarated. It's delightful. I feel as if I could write a poem equal to one of Moore's, or deliver an oration that would make me forever famous," and he threw himself into a tragic attitude.

Rushton did not smile. He was palpably uneasy.

A year passed.

In the "University of the South" the "M. P. and B. Club" still flourished. A few of its members had not returned at the beginning of the school year, and some new ones had been admitted. The number was strictly limited to twenty.

"A crowd is always a bother," Holliday had said.

As he was head and front of the club, his opinion always prevailed.

One morning about the middle of the term, Dixon button-holed Rushton as the latter was passing into the chapel, and drew him to one side.

"I'm in trouble. Do you know Holliday is called home?"

"No. Is he? Why?"

"He read me a letter from his father. It's odd, but his family seem to feel uneasy about him."

Rushton looked interested.

"Was any reason given for their uneasiness?"

“A rumor has reached them that he is using too much wine, and that he is not up in his studies.”

As Rushton was silent, Charley continued, in a low voice :

“It’s odd how such a rumor got to them. Holliday thinks some of the people of the town must have made the trouble. You know three of our members are Sewanee boys, and Rob Nelson withdrew last week. His father, as Rob expressed it, ‘sat down on the club.’”

“I am not surprised,” said his listener, quietly.

“Nor I. Old Nelson is pretty straight-laced. One night Holliday’s wine flew to Rob’s head a bit, and when he got home his father ‘interviewed’ him. No doubt he is at the bottom of this mischief. The professors are as much troubled over Holliday’s call home as the rest of us. They expected a good deal from him.”

“Yet he has certainly fallen back of late. His record isn’t up to yours, Charley.”

Dixon winced.

“And mine is below par. It’s odd, but my head is not clear this year. Holliday says that he is growing aged, entering his dotage, is why he can’t half study.”

“Did he show his letter to Dr. Keene?”

As Rushton asked this question he looked keenly into his companion’s face. Dr. Keene stood at the head of the University.

“No,” answered Charley, frankly. “He was afraid it might cause questions to be asked, and injure the club. He merely said an urgent call had come for him to return home.”

“Have you not noticed a change in Holliday yourself this year?”

“Yes. I can see that he is different, and it bothers me. He’s not well, he says, and he is certainly looking ill. I don’t see what we are going to do without him. The club will fall to pieces, I’m afraid.”

“Would that be a calamity?”

Rushton’s tone expressed a great deal.

“A calamity! I should say so. The only fun there is in this stupid old place is in that club.”

“Yet the rest of us manage to get along very well without it.”

Charley shrugged his shoulders. Just then the last chapel bell sounded, and the conversation ended.

It was true that Holliday was called home. He took it badly. His spirit had never been of the amiable sort, and now he almost grew vindictive. He said to Dixon, who was his chosen friend :

“It’s downright shabby in the governor to treat me so. He was hard on me during vacation. Said I was going too deep into wine and cards, as if he didn’t do the same. Why, it was he who taught me to use both. Mother used to feel a bit afraid, but he laughed at her. And now, just as I’m a man, he wants to put the reins on me.”

Dixon looked sympathetic, but was silent. Holliday broke out afresh :

“I’ll show him I’m not a baby. I’ll make him glad to send me back. I’ll bet a five I’m with you all in less than a month.”

But he was not.

The club did not fall to pieces, as Dixon had feared, but it was not the same.

Rushton used his influence to win Charley into another set, but he did not succeed.

"Everything in Sewanee is a bore except our club," Dixon one day announced to him. "I do wish you'd join us, Rushton. You are the most popular fellow here, now Holliday's gone. Come over and join us to-night. Do! there's a good fellow. We really need you. We're going on a lark. There'll be no end of fun."

"What kind of a lark?"

Rushton looked the soul of interest.

"That's telling. Unless you join us you can't know. You know ours is a secret society."

"I don't think I believe in secret societies."

"That's because you are getting to be an out-and-out crank. I wish you were to be anything else on earth but a parson. It's the calling you expect to follow that makes you so straight-laced. Why couldn't you be a prize-fighter? You've got muscle enough."

They both laughed, although Rushton did not seem at ease.

“I wish you’d give up this ‘lark,’ Charley,” he said, earnestly. “The professors are a bit suspicious about the club already. There are some wild spirits among you this year.”

“Jolly good fellows, every one. Your kind want to make mummies out of us, but you can’t. We know too well what real fun is.”

His tone was impatient. He was growing restless of all restraint.

Rushton said no more, and they separated.

CHAPTER III.

THE "lark" came near proving a serious affair. It was a trick played upon a new student, and was supposed by the perpetrators to be harmless. The result was that the boy fell ill. Then the whole occurrence came out.

Dixon, who had headed the affair, had several days of acute suffering. He feared he would be suspended. This, of course, meant disgrace.

He went to Rushton. "I was a dolt not to listen to you," he said, ruefully. "We really meant no harm; but we each had a bumper of wine before we started. It may have made us a bit too merry. Anyway, poor Hardy got hurt. I'm really and seriously troubled about it. If I'm suspended, it will just kill my mother. She has set her heart upon seeing me come out of the University with flying colors."

"And I hope you will still do so," said his friend, cheerfully. "Hardy is not seriously in-

jured. It was a bad business, but you'll not engage in it again."

"That I won't. I'm the only son, you know, and my father died when I was only a chap. Mother has no one but me to look to. I'm to be a doctor, like my father. The sooner I'm graduated the better. Our pile of money is not very high, and it's going fast."

There were several interviews with the professors; long conversations; hours of harrowing suspense. Then the delinquents were severely reprimanded, but not suspended. After this affair Dixon seemed changed. He still met the club, but his was not, as formerly, one of the leading spirits. One day he came to Rushton with an open letter in his hand. His face was pallid.

"Rushton, here's awful news. Holliday is dead. He shot himself."

"Impossible! How did you hear?"

"Harry Norton wrote me. His home is in the same city."

"How did he come to do it? This is, indeed, awful tidings."

Both young men sank into chairs, as if too much unnerved to remain upon their feet. Dixon said :

“It seems that he had been drinking heavily and gambling. Norton says that he did the same last summer. It does not seem possible, yet Harry avers it is true. Well, his father discovered that he was losing money, and upbraided him cruelly. His mother also reproached him with tears, and said he had disgraced the family. Holliday couldn’t stand it. You know how proud he was. He went out and shot himself.”

Charley groaned aloud, then added : “It seems too awful to be true.”

Rushton was silent. He knew how Charley had loved Holliday, and words seemed useless to comfort.

The entire college was shocked at the awful tidings. A half-holiday was given. Many of the students pinned crape upon their hats.

Charley Dixon looked five years older, and his face grew haggard. On Friday night he said to Rushton :

“You must come with me. It is to be the last meeting our club will hold.”

“All right ; I will go.”

It was a sombre meeting. All the life and sparkle seemed drained from the young faces.

“We have met for the purpose of disbanding this club,” said Dixon, slowly.

“Holliday’s fate has convinced us that our motto is wrong. Moderation, pluck and backbone failed to save him. It may fail to save us.”

“Why not organize a new club upon the ruins of the old?” suggested Rushton. “We might call ourselves the ‘T., P. and B. Club,’ Teetotalism, Pluck and Backbone. Do not let us make it a secret society, but get every student in the University to join us if possible.”

Everybody looked interested.

“We can make it bright, jolly, and entertaining. Declamations, debates and readings, and a farce now and then, would give us variety. And we might have a spread sometimes, with lemonade and wafers.”

The idea spread at once, and the club was duly organized.

"I want to confess that I'm afraid I was almost as near ruin as poor Holliday," Dixon said, before they separated. "The wine I drank hurt me. Not at first, but this last year I have not been the same fellow; and I find myself wanting a stimulant all the time."

Another student murmured: "I'm the same way."

"It's a pretty hard pull to give it up," Dixon continued. "I'm glad I'm enrolled as a teetotaler. Let's get up a pledge, and all sign it."

It was done. Ordinarily, among such a merry set of students, it would have been impossible to accomplish this; but the shock of Holliday's tragic death was upon them, and even the most reckless were sobered into thoughtfulness.

One more scene, and we will close.

It is near the end of the college year. The "T., P. and B. Club" are holding their last meeting before commencement. A merrier set of youths it would be difficult to find. Nearly

every student in the college has been enrolled as a member. Dr. Keene has long ago given the club his heartiest approval. A lively debate is up. The question is: "Is the use of intoxicants in moderation safe?"

Many fine addresses have already been given. The talent seems to have been quite evenly divided; but those against the use are winning the heartiest applause. Perhaps it is because the speakers are in such deadly earnest. Never did Rushton speak as he does to-night. He carries his audience with him, and continual cheers interrupt him.

The last speaker to appear is Charley Dixon. Briefly he touches upon Holliday's bright, promising life. From the first word he utters breathless attention is given him. All know how he loved the dead, and the pathos in his voice touches every heart. Briefly and rapidly he recounts his friend's downward steps, and then, in a few burning sentences, pictures the end. He adds:

"This one tragic death should settle the question; and thousands, nay, millions, of

young men to-day are answering it as did our poor friend. It is time that we, who have learned the truth at so great a cost, should boldly and unwaveringly declare it. Nothing but total abstinence is safe. A few more months of the moderate use of wine, and, instead of standing here to-night to vindicate the cause of right and truth, I, too, might have been beyond the power of earthly help."

He paused for a moment, and then, with an upward glance of untold love and reverence, he added:

"I want to confess that I found the fight so hard I had to get help from above. Without divine aid, I am sure I could not have conquered."

Rushton's eyes were moist. None but he and Charley knew of the earnest words spoken between them since Holliday's death.

That speech won the hearts of the few students who had hitherto held aloof. At its close they, too, signed the pledge.

When the debate was over the club adjourned for an hour's fun and recreation. They met in

the handsome rooms formerly occupied by Holiday. Baskets of lovely flowers occupied every available niche. This club was dear to the mothers of Sewanee, and they vied with one another in helping make the meetings attractive. Great pitchers of iced lemonade were brought in and plates piled high with delicate wafers. Jokes, puns and witticisms, with a college song or two, filled up the hour. Then all retired to sweet and refreshing slumber. At the last moment, before separating, Rushton grasped Dixon's hand :

"I am glad you were true to your Captain to-night, Charley. It cost something to make that confession."

"No, really it did not," his friend responded, earnestly. "The fact is, I'm so happy in feeling that he is helping me that I can't keep still; and two or three of the other fellows are finding out the secret of having this Friend to go to. Your work among us has been quiet, Rushton, but it is being owned. The leaven is spreading."

Rushton's face was radiant. It is so sweet to

know that our Captain is using us to turn his enemies into friends.

Dixon's last words had the ring of a bugle as he said : " ' In all these things we are *more* than conquerors.' If only poor Holliday could have found it out in time. It seems to me that I'm just beginning to live, Rushton ; that I've been asleep all my past life."

He was right. How many there are about us still sleeping! Are we striving to awaken them?

A DANGER SIGNAL.

A DANGER SIGNAL.

A TRUE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

JACK PAYTON'S usually sunny face was clouded.

His handsome store was the popular resort for the Glyndon students. Upon this particular Saturday afternoon some half-dozen of them were making merry in his cosy little office.

Jack had been busy about the store, and had only now joined them. He found them engaged in playing a game of cards. His expressive face betrayed his surprised disapproval, although he spoke no word of remonstrance.

"Payton, you're an out-and-out crank," cried Ned Holsten, merrily. "Charley, here," pointing to a genial-faced, manly-looking fellow, who alone was not engaged in the game, "said you'd disapprove of our way of passing the time, but I didn't believe him. You're such a jolly sort

of fellow, I couldn't imagine you'd be so straight-laced. Your face of horror, however, proves him right."

"What sensible objection is there to cards, anyway?" Harry Norton querulously asked. "I've never yet heard a good reason given."

He was one of Glyndon's oldest students, and had known Jack Payton ever since that young gentleman had first made this growing town his home.

"Yes, Jack, state your objections."

It was Dixon who spoke. He was an old Glyndon student, but for the past two years he had attended another college. He had taken this Saturday to run up to visit Payton, for he and the young merchant were staunch friends.

"If you think it right to play cards, Charley, how is it you are not taking a hand?"

As he thus spoke, Jack flashed Dixon one of those searching glances which the boys were wont to say "laid bare their very souls to his inspection."

"Well, I'm not quite clear about the right and the wrong of card-playing," the young fel-

low answered. "Rushton and I had a talk upon the subject just before we left Sewanee. He condemns the practice altogether, although a few months back he used sometimes to take a hand with us."

"What changed him?"

"Something which changed us all, more or less. I'll tell you about it after a while. Rush-ton has turned out a fellow after your own heart, Jack. He says he owes whatever he is more to you than to any other living man."

Payton's face flushed with pleasure. Rush-ton was also an old Glyndon student, and one of Jack's warm friends.

"I'm glad to know he is doing well. I knew there was fine material in him."

"Come, Cranky, tell us what harm there is in cards. We will suspend our game until we hear your reasons. If you convince us, we'll agree to burn our deck, and play no more. If you fail, we shall insist upon you and Charley taking a hand and helping us out."

It was Ned Holsten who spoke.

Payton dropped into an easy chair, and, after

glancing sharply down the long store, to see that everything was being properly attended to, he began: "I suppose, Ned, you know the latest definition of a crank?"

"I'm not sure. What is it?"

"Something about which another fellow has a decided opinion, to which I have never given a thought."

A ringing laugh, at Holsten's expense, greeted these words. He reddened a little, but, good-naturedly, said: "Pretty good. But give us your story, for I know there *is* a story. I see it in your eyes."

"You are right. It is not a short story, nor one I enjoy telling. However, if you will have patience—"

"Go ahead."

"Don't palaver."

"Pitch in."

"We're waiting."

Thus interrupted and encouraged, Jack began: "My home is in New Orleans. My father is a well-known physician there. He is a man whose integrity and honor no one, I think, has

ever doubted. He is also a Christian, and wields a wide influence for good.

“Our household consisted of two brothers, two sisters and myself. Our mother died when we were but little chaps. I am the oldest, and I have but a faint remembrance of her. Her face, as I recall it, was angelic, and I know, from my father’s words, that her character must have been in keeping with her face. What her death meant to him and to us we shall never fully know.”

Payton paused. His hearers’ sympathetic eyes were riveted upon his mobile countenance. The tenderest spot in any boy’s heart is where the image of his mother is impressed. For some minutes not a word was spoken. Each youth was conjuring up from memory the face dearest to him upon earth. At last Charley Dixon said, very gently, “Go on, old fellow.”

“I beg your pardon. I had forgotten my story in the rush of old memories and associations.

“Mine was a happy childhood and youth. An

aunt strove to fill my mother's vacant place, and she petted and spoiled us to our hearts' content.

"My father had very decided ideas about the rearing of boys. He said that home must be made bright and attractive, else we would seek amusement elsewhere. All innocent diversions, as he considered them, were given us. We were all carefully trained in music, and the way we made those walls ring with our solos, our duets and quartettes, only our long-suffering neighbors could tell."

"Was your father musical?"

It was Holsten who put this query.

"Decidedly so. He joined us in the evenings, whenever his professional duties would permit. It is needless to say that we had jolly times. We were early taught to play cards. One of my earliest remembrances is seeing my father deal the cards, and then teaching us the various games. He told us it was ungentlemanly and wrong ever to put up stakes, but to play in the parlor with ladies was harmless. We were devoted to father, and thought him the best and wisest man on earth."

“Naturally. He must be a brick,” said Harry Norton. He considered his own parents far too strict and straight-laced.

Jack continued: “We often had card-parties, as we grew older. These and our parlor dances were very popular. The best people in the city were our associates, and attended these gatherings. When I was about eighteen, I made a new friend. His name was Dick Travers. His mother was a widow, and he was her only child. He was a handsome, wide-awake, splendid fellow, and we all soon learned to love him.”

Again Payton paused. The shadow in his eyes deepened, and a heavy sigh escaped him, as he proceeded with his narrative.

“My father was especially fond of him, and used to call him his ‘other son.’

“The first time we asked him to play cards he refused. His refusal greatly nettled my father. Only those who joined us in the game were ever invited to these card-parties. Dick had been counted upon to help fill up a table. My father remonstrated with him, and told him the game was perfectly harmless. I added my

voice and entreaty, and the result was that Dick was induced to join us."

Once more Jack sighed. Charley Dixon echoed it, in sympathy with the evident pain this narrative cost his friend. Even Holsten looked very serious as the story was continued.

"He learned to play more quickly than any one I ever saw. That first evening he won two games. We all congratulated him warmly, and he left us in fine spirits.

"After that he never missed an evening when cards were to be handled. He developed into an extraordinary player, and soon won more games than all the rest of us put together. His whole soul seemed to centre in the game, and when he lost, his eyes would blaze with the most intense excitement. This amused my sisters, and they bantered him constantly upon his 'master-passion,' as they learned to term his remarkable fondness for cards."

"When a fellow loves the game like that, he'd better swear off at once," said Dixon. "Any habit, especially any doubtful one, which

takes hold of one with such over-mastering power is dangerous.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that, Charley,” replied Jack. “Even then I had something of your feeling, but I never gave voice to it but once. This was one evening when Dick gaily proposed to play for pennies. I think my sisters would have agreed to his proposition, had not my father at once interfered. His words were quite stern, as he drew the line between gentlemanly playing and gambling. I could see that Dick was hurt, and he went away before the evening was half spent. I followed him to the door, and, as gently as I could, urged him to give up cards. I shall never forget the scorn in his voice and his eyes as he said: ‘*You* are a pretty one, Jack, to advise that! You, who led me into it! No, sir! I’ve found out what a dunce I was not to have had this enjoyment long ago, and I’m not going to give it up just as I’ve learned what real fun is.’”

CHAPTER II.

“THIS is a hard story for me to finish, boys,” Payton said, as his listeners waited for him to continue.

“Yes; one can see that Travers was a fool. I’ve no patience with such ill-balanced fellows,” cried Ned Holsten, hotly.

“Nor I,” added Clarence Hawley, who was a cool-headed, rather phlegmatic, youth. “Why can’t folks take life easily, and not run into extremes.”

“All people are not put up like you, Hawley,” said Dixon. His interest in the story was almost painful, and his sympathy with Payton was most evident.

“After that night,” Jack resumed, “Dick never came back to us. We heard of him as consorting with some of the wildest fellows in the city. Father was greatly disgusted, and told me to ‘cut his acquaintance’ at once. I was saved the pain of obeying this command by Mrs. Travers suddenly removing from the city.

“I met her upon the street the day she left. She was a beautiful woman, but her face that morning struck me as being the saddest I ever looked upon. She plainly avoided speaking to me, and this hurt me. We had all shown her much attention, and I thoroughly liked her.

“Well, for two years we wholly lost sight of them. As I was on my way from New Orleans to Glyndon, the first time I visited this place, I passed through the city of Montgomery, and stayed over for a night and a day. I was looking for a good place in which to locate and start in business, and thought perhaps that city would answer.

“As I was passing down the street, I suddenly came face to face with Dick Travers. He was so changed that, for one moment, I failed to recognize him. His face was red and bloated, and his whole appearance was disreputable. But I really loved him, and, as I saw who it was, I put out my hand to him with all the warmth of other days. Imagine my chagrin when he coolly placed both his hands behind his back!

“‘Won’t you shake hands, Dick?’ I said, much pained.

“‘WITH YOU? Never!’

“I cannot tell you the scorn and bitterness which were in his tones. I felt as if he had struck me.

“‘Why not?’ I asked. ‘I have always been your friend.’

“The laugh which greeted these words made me shiver.

“‘MY FRIEND!’ he said, in a tone of derision and sarcasm. ‘You mean my deadliest foe. Yes, sir! I am a ruined man, body and soul. And I owe it to *you* and to your white-livered father. A whited sepulchre he is, and you are another.’

“And he poured out such a volley of curses and oaths as made me almost reel. I tried to stem the torrent of his wrath, but my words only angered him the more.

“‘My mother had taught me never to touch a card, nor taste wine,’ he hissed out. ‘She said, because of some hereditary taint in my blood, I could not safely tamper with such

things. I loved her as I loved my own soul, and I heeded her counsel. I was never even tempted to disregard her words until that night I met your hypocrite of a father. I knew he was a church member, and I believed he was a good man. I listened to him and to you, and now where am I? In the gutter; in hell!’

“I cannot convey to you an idea of the wrath which possessed him. I could see that he had been drinking. He seemed to be possessed of a demon, which the sight of me aroused to insane fury. He went on, each word burning itself into my brain, as if branded with a red-hot iron.

“‘I have been in jail many times. My mother’s heart broke two months’ ago. Yes, and you and your father are her murderers; yes, her MURDERERS! Do you hear? And I am a lost man—lost—lost for this world and for the world to come. My blood and my mother’s blood is upon *you*, curse you!’”

Jack paused. The silence was oppressive. No one had the heart to speak.

At last Dixon reached over and grasped his hand. This silent act of sympathy brought a

quick moisture to Jack's eye. He passed his hand across his brow, and resumed:

"I need hardly say to you that that hour was the saddest of my life. He left me, refusing to listen to a word I could utter.

"I remained in Montgomery for three days, trying to trace him. I thought perhaps when he was not under the influence of liquor I might help him. But my search was unavailing, and no wonder; he went, the very night after our meeting, to Mobile. A week later I saw his name in the paper. He had been fatally shot in a gambling den. Thus ends my story."

"And a horrible one it is," said Harry Norton, quickly. "I, for one, am done with cards. I don't care much for them, anyway, and I'll not run the risk of helping send some weak fellow to the bad, as poor Travers went. Ugh! I should think, Payton, his ghost would haunt you every night."

"No words can tell what I have suffered," Jack responded. His face looked five years older than when he entered the little office an hour before.

"The telling of this story has cost me much," he added. "May our Captain use it, boys, to induce you to give up this dangerous game."

"Thank you for telling it," said Ned Holsten, in a low voice. "I have a contempt for a fellow as easily led off as was Travers; but here go the cards. The deck is mine, and it must burn."

As he spoke, he picked up the spotted bits of pasteboard, and tossed them into the open grate. As he did so, the others gathered about him. Some remonstrated, but the majority were with him.

Dixon said, quite huskily: "From my soul, Jack, I thank you for the story. I now stand with Rushton. My influence henceforth shall ever be against those cards 'dyed with men's blood,' as some one has aptly put it. I shall never again look upon a deck of them without seeing poor Travers' blood upon them."

"Nor I," added Norton.

"It is hardly necessary for me to say," Jack continued, "that cards are now banished from my father's house. He felt poor Dick's fate almost as keenly as did I."

A clerk now summoned Payton into the store, and the students were left alone. An earnest discussion at once began among them, headed by Clarence Hawley. He still maintained that cards were harmless, and that Jack had been in nowise responsible for Travers' fate. "A fellow put up like that would have been led off some time. Such a fool deserved his fate. It was only a matter of a year or two at most, and Payton is no end silly to feel as he does over the matter."

"That's so," agreed Sam Dickson. "Still, I don't fancy being the person to help lead such a fellow to the bad. I'm sure my sleep wouldn't be sound after listening to such words as were poured into Jack's ear. I believe I've played my last game."

Thus the entire number stood as a unit against Clarence.

As they separated, Charley Dixon said: "Since I left Glyndon, boys, I have found a Captain, under whose banner I have enlisted for life. I want to tell you what a joy it is to have this Captain for my friend, and to have

his help when I'm bothered and in trouble. He sticks close to a fellow, I can tell you, and never leaves one in the cold."

Charley's face was quite radiant, and the upward glance of his eyes, as he spoke of his "Captain," left no doubt as to his meaning.

Clarence Hawley said, just under his breath: "Botheration. Who'd have thought of Dixon taking that line."

Harry Norton looked interested, and merry Ned Holsten said: "You're a brick, Charley. I don't go in for such things myself, though I intend to some day. But I like to see a fellow who sticks to his colors, and who is not afraid to run up his flag."

Dixon smiled. "Don't wait too long, Ned, before you enlist. It pays to serve such a Captain. I never want to do anything about which I'm not sure of his mind. Card-playing was one thing which put me on the fence. Now I know just where he wants me to stand, and I feel better. No more cards for me, now or ever."

This avowed allegiance to Christ made a pro-

found impression upon his hearers. They knew Charley to be a manly, merry fellow, full of fun and witticisms, and his bold words in favor of religion moved them as no sermon could have done.

Why are young Christians so slow to avow their love and loyalty to the Master? Their words of testimony often have more weight with their companions than all the sermons heard during a lifetime.

THE
SHOP AT BLACK'S CORNER.

THE SHOP AT BLACK'S CORNER.

CHAPTER I.

“WHEN’S he comin’, Jack?”
“To-morrow.”

The first speaker, Ned Holton, a man in the prime of life, looked thoughtfully at his companion. Jack Asbury was worth looking at.

He was about seventeen years of age, firmly and compactly built. His eyes held a sparkle which told of courage and resolution, and the cleft in his finely-moulded chin expressed the same characteristic. His hair was dark and curly, his mouth like a model’s, and, taking him all together, he was as wholesome a looking lad as one often sees.

He was standing in a blacksmith’s shop, and his rolled-up sleeves disclosed as strong and

muscular a pair of arms as was ever owned by a college athlete or a city gymnast.

It did not seem possible, looking into his refined face, to believe him a blacksmith, yet such was his occupation.

"I don't see a ghost of a chance fur ye, Jack," Ned Holton said.

"I know; that's the way everybody talks. But I'll try, all the same. 'Nothing venture, nothing win,' is the way the old adage runs."

The boy smiled as he spoke, but the smile was not a cheery one.

"Ef the new owner hed jist a-knowed yer father, it would be dif'rent," the man continued. "Every one owned he ware the best blacksmith in the valley, an' hit stands to reason you must be good at the trade, havin' served under him fur so long."

"Ever since I was old enough to swing a hammer," the lad said, with another faint smile.

"But Mr. Payton don't know this, ye see, an' ther'll be nary chance for yore friens ter tell him, 'cause Jake Brown air a-goin' ter meet him at the cross-roads ez he cums, an' beg fur

the place. An' Jake air built fur a blacksmith out an' out, an' you—wal—you don't jis seem ter fit inter the notch whar ye b'long."

The boy glanced down eloquently at his bared arms, where the muscles stood out like whip-cords, but he spoke no word. The man laughed.

"Yas, them's good arms. I 'low thet much; but yer'd hardly make yore applercation ter the young master with yore sleeves rolled up. Hit wouldn't look right, ye see, an' Jake looks the burly blacksmith all over. Better give up the idee, Jack, an' try somethin' else."

The vernacular of the Tennessee mountaineer was apparent in every word Ned Holton uttered. Jack Asbury's speech was different. The cause of the difference might be explained by the fact that the lad's parents were New Englanders, whom failing health, before Jack's birth, had driven southward.

"What else *can* I try?" the boy asked, with sudden passion. "I don't know how to do anything but shoe horses. I can do that as well as my father did. I *must* get the place,"

he added, vehemently. "There's Bess and Alice coming. Don't say a word about failure to them. Bess hasn't an idea but that we shall stay just where we are, and that I shall fall right into father's place."

As he ceased speaking, two little girls came into the shop. The elder was about fifteen, and the other was a tot of only three summers. Both bore so strong a resemblance to Jack that the relationship between them was at once apparent.

Ned Holton's rough face softened as he looked at them, and a mist dimmed his eyes. He drew a ripe pear from his pocket, and handed it to the baby, while the smile which curved his lips was as tender as a woman's.

"Say 'thank you,' Alice," the elder girl prompted.

The little one looked shyly up into the mountaineer's kindly face, disclosing eyes of a deep violet, as she said, "Sank-oo."

"Well, little mother, how goes the house-keeping?" merrily inquired Jack.

His gay tone was assumed, but only Ned suspected this.

"Very nicely," responded Bess, "only I need a lot of things. I'm so glad Mr. Payton is coming to-morrow. Then this tiresome waiting will be over. You must buy me some raisins, Jack, the first thing, and I will make a rice pudding. We haven't had one since—since papa left us."

Her voice broke a little on the last words, but she bravely forced back some starting tears.

"Me—doin'—see—papa—soon," prattled Alice; "me—dood—baby."

"So you are," said Jack, patting her curly head. "What would 'little mother' and brother do without you?"

These children had read *Little Dorritt*, and Jack had affectionately applied that unselfish little being's home name, "little mother," to Bess. This delighted the child, and in all possible ways she tried to emulate the beautiful character which the great novelist has so simply and clearly drawn.

Ned Holton turned and strode abruptly away. He muttered aloud as he got beyond hearing: "Ter think o' them children havin'

nuther father nur mother alivin'! An' Jack ez good ez turned out'n the shop! Things does go mighty cu'yus somehow in this world. An' John Asbury ez good a man ez ever walked."

And then he doubled up his big fist and struck into space, as he continued, in a louder tone: "I'd like ter knock Jake Brown so fur away thet he couldn't git back ter save his life in time ter rob thet boy o' his rights—a sneakin', loafin', good-fur-naught air Jake. But he do know how ter shoe a hoss. I'm willin' ter 'low thet much. An' he'll git the shop. Nary chance fur pore little Jack, I'm afeared."

The mountaineers have a peculiar, swinging gait, which enables them to cover long distances with ease and swiftness. Ned was tall and lank, and his length of limb soon carried him far from the shop and its interesting group of inmates. His mind partially turned from Jack Asbury and his troubles to his own hopes and prospects. When he reached home he said to his wife: "I'm hopin' ter git the gardenin' from Mr. Payton, the same ez I had

from his uncle. I'm the best gard'ner anywhar 'bout this valley. Everybody 'lows thet's true. Mr. Bell, who air still a-lookin' arter things at the hall 'till the new owner comes, sed ter day ez how he'd tell the young master 'bout me, an' how much store Mr. Parker allus sot by me."

"Mr. Bell air a kind man," the woman replied; "wi' him ter speak for ye, p'raps ye'll git the place. Hit'll be a hard winter fur us ef ye don't."

"I ware a-thinkin'," continued Ned, in a musing tone, "ef I gits the gardenin' an' truckin' ter do, we mought feel able ter help Jack Asbury an' his sisters a leetle. He air a-goin' ter lose the shop, sarten, onless Providence stands close by him. Jake Brown hev swore he air a-goin' ter git hit, an' Jake air a man ez means what he says. An' Jake air a good blacksmith, while Jack air only a boy. I'm afeared Mr. Payton won't think o' lettin' sich a lad keep the shop."

"Hit'll seem hard fur him ter be turned out," the woman answered, busy over the stove. "Ef he air, an' the good Lord gives

you the work at the hall, hit'll only be right fur us ter help him. He air a likely boy, an' the gals is ez smart an' pretty ez pinks."

Her husband heaved a sigh of relief. He had not been quite sure how she would take his proposition. They had four children to care for, and money was scarce.

"Yer's a good woman, Maggie," he said, as he reached up and took down the family Bible from the shelf upon which it always lay. He opened it, and began to pore over its well-worn pages.

These people, humble as they were, were simple-hearted, earnest Christians. This Bible was their only book; they prized it as their one great treasure.

CHAPTER II.

“JUST eight o’clock ; and Mr. Payton is expected at the cross-roads at ten. I must soon be off,” said Jack Asbury to himself the following morning.

He had been at work in the shop. The fire was still red, and the sound of his anvil had been heard for over an hour. This shop was situated at a turn of the highway called by the people of the vicinity “Black’s Corner.” While it stood in a seemingly lonely and isolated position on the edge of a forest, with no house visible but the cottage occupied by Jack and his sisters, it was really in the centre of a thickly-settled neighborhood. It was also close to the Parker plantation, one of the largest and richest farms in the valley. To this shop was given all the blacksmith work of the plantation, and the stand was considered the best in the entire county.

As Jack was taking off his apron preparatory

to departure, he heard the sound of horses' hoofs. He stepped to the door.

Two horsemen drew rein. One was a stout, middle-aged man, with a kindly, jovial face; the other was younger, with a countenance which at once caught Jack's fancy.

"Where's the blacksmith?" asked the younger of the two.

Then, seeing the apron still suspended to Jack's waist, and noting the grime upon his hands, he added:

"Can *you* shoe a horse?"

"That's my trade," modestly replied Jack. "Squire Tanner has seen me shoe a horse." This last was said with a quick glance and smile directed toward the older man.

"Bless my heart! It's Jack. I didn't know you; how you've grown. Yes, John, he can do your work," he added, turning to his friend. "His father was out of the shop once a year or so ago when my horse cast a shoe just as I passed the door. The lad did the work well, and greatly obliged I was to him, for I was in haste, just as we are to-day."

The young man looked dissatisfied.

“But my mare is spirited. She objects to having her feet handled.”

The animal was a magnificent thoroughbred. Jack's eyes kindled as he noted her beauty. The next moment he remembered Mr. Payton and the cross-roads, and said: “There's another shop some three miles farther on.”

“You're afraid to undertake the job, are you?”

The question was almost a sneer, and the young man restlessly flicked a fly from his horse's ear as he spoke.

Jack's eyes flashed, but he answered, quietly: “No, sir. I'm in something of a hurry, though; but if you will trust your horse to me I can shoe her.”

It cost him an effort to say this, for he knew it was full time he was on the road. But he had noticed that the animal limped. Her loose shoe hurt her. If her owner rode her to the next shop before it was removed he knew she might be seriously injured. The young man dismounted without further words, merely say-

ing, as he glanced around the shop, "Have you no assistant?"

"Sometimes," was the lad's brief reply. "To-day I am alone. I had expected to close the shop before this."

He quietly made his preparations, while the two men watched him. Then he stepped to the animal's head and gently took the bridle from her master's hand. He spoke to the restless creature, who laid back her small ears at his voice and touch, and made a movement as though to bite his arm. He laughed, and softly patted her head, then, still talking to her, rubbed her nose. She became quiet. He drew a lump of sugar from his pocket; she took it daintily. His voice, his touch, and the sugar won her. She rubbed her nose against his breast and gave a low neigh. She was asking him for another lump of the sugar. Jack gave a laugh of satisfaction. "No, my lady; no more just now. After a while, if you are good, you shall have another piece."

"You love horses," the stranger said, his whole bearing towards the lad changed.

"Yes, sir ; that is why I like to shoe them. And they love me."

"It is quite wonderful how Silverheels takes to you. She is usually impatient of all strangers," the young man continued, watching Jack's movements with great interest.

"Jack is like his father, a born blacksmith," said the Squire, well pleased with the prospect of speedily getting his friend upon the road again. "Where is your father, Jack?"

The boy winced. He had, by gentleness, coaxing and patience, succeeded in getting the spirited animal to allow him to handle her foot. He deftly removed the loose shoe before he replied: "In heaven, sir. He died over a month ago."

His voice was low. His face was concealed from view, and neither of his listeners suspected how deeply the question moved him.

"Forgive me. I had not heard. He was a good man and a fine blacksmith. I'm sorry he's gone."

The Squire was a kind-hearted man, though bluff in his ways. Not dreaming how his words

cut into the boy's heart, he continued; "What are you going to do? Follow his trade?"

Jack did not at once reply. He was attempting to pare the hoof from which he had just removed the shoe. The animal objected to this. Suddenly she gave a kick and a plunge, which, had Jack not been on his guard, would have knocked him over. His alertness saved him, and his presence of mind made him master of the situation.

The door of the shop stood open. As he stepped from the reach of the mare's hoof, without a moment's pause he sprang to the large door and swung it to. With an angry snort the beautiful creature rushed towards the closing aperture to escape. She was met by the intrepid boy, who, unmindful of her ears, which were laid back viciously, reached out and firmly seized her by the bridle. She made a swift movement as though to bite him, and this time she really did nip his shirt with her teeth. He spoke to her in a tone entirely different from his former one. It was low but firm, and the gentle strength which pervaded

it bore immediate fruit. The mare dropped her head as though in shame.

"She knows she has been vicious," said her master, with a smile, "and she is mortified because of her bad behavior."

Jack laughed, and again patted her neck and rubbed her nose. When he felt that she had reached a proper stage of penitence he fed her with another lump of sugar.

"You've conquered her," said the young man, quietly. The words were not much, but his eyes spoke volumes.

"Yes; but it will be best for me to wait a bit and let her know me a little better before I finish the job. How old is she?"

"Four years old last June."

Jack gave her another lump of sugar, and then, very gently, he began to rub and handle her feet, talking to her all the time. He lifted first one foot and then another, tapping each hoof as he did so, until he came to the one on which he was to continue working.

"You are an adroit blacksmith," said the young man, with a laugh; "if you studied men

as you do horses, you would make a good lawyer."

"Aye! so he would," the Squire said, heartily; "why don't you aim for something higher than shoeing horses, Jack? The law is a noble profession, and I believe, from your ways, you would make your mark if you entered it."

"I prefer to be a blacksmith," was the lad's reply.

CHAPTER III.

“**W**OULD you mind holding the mare’s head, sir, while I finish paring her hoof?”

Jack’s question was addressed to the young man, who at once stepped to the animal’s head.

“I’m sorry to trouble you, but she needs some one there. The boy who usually helps me is off for the day. Please talk to her, sir, and rub her nose while I am at work.”

He gave his entire attention to the hoof for the next few moments, and not a word was spoken but the caressing ones of the stranger addressed to his horse.

When the hoof was prepared, and the shoe had been fitted, Jack said, with a quick glance at the Squire: “Now I will answer your question, sir. I hope to follow my father’s trade, but my plans are not very deeply laid as yet; I would rather have this shop and shoe horses, though, than do anything else.”

“Do you own the shop?”

It was the young man who asked this question.

"No, sir; it belonged to Mr. Parker. Since he died I am told a Mr. Payton comes into possession of it, as well as into all the rest of his uncle's property."

The stranger looked interested.

"Have you ever met the new heir?"

"No, sir; I hope to see him this morning, unless I am too late. Some one else is going to apply for the shop—a full-grown man—but I am hoping, somehow, the new master will give it to me. Why I dare hope it I hardly know."

He laughed a trifle bitterly as he thought how slight his chances were of success.

"I know Payton well; he's a cross-grained fellow, so you need not build much hope on him. Who is the other applicant?"

"Jake Brown. He is a good smith, I must admit that; but he doesn't love horses as my father did, nor can he manage them so well."

"You seem to have caught your father's knack," the young man said.

He glanced in a pleased way at the mare. She was still nervous, as her frequent starts proved, but she evidently trusted the one who was handling her.

"Payton isn't as bad as John would make out," said the Squire, coming up and standing by Jack's side. "I know him. He's a first-rate fellow, though a bit cranky at times. Don't lose heart, Jack. I'll speak a good word for you, if necessary, and John, here, won't forget you when he sees Payton. He'll be sure to tell him how nicely you've handled this skittish beast of his. You're done now, aren't you?"

Both men were impatient to be off. Jack was no less so. He glanced at the shoe he had just nailed to the animal's foot, and then looked up at the sun. It must now be past nine o'clock.

For one moment he hesitated. There was a nail which he knew was not perfectly right; but the shoe might stay in place for a long time, unless the horse was ridden rapidly over a rough road. But he knew it would not be a well-finished piece of work. This thought steadied his wavering resolution.

"No, I'm not done yet," he said, quickly. "Here is a nail that must come out and be put in over again. I'm sorry to detain you, and sorry to detain myself, but I can't let a piece of bad work go out of my shop. My father taught me that, as well as how to shoe a horse."

Both men looked sharply into his face, but made no response.

After a moment's silence the Squire asked: "Who did you say the fellow is that is going to try and get the shop from you?" He was impatiently striking his riding-whip against his boot, while he watched the lad draw out the crooked nail.

"Jake Brown; he used to have a shop at Farwell a year or so ago."

"Yes; I recollect him. A good smith, too. Looks as if he was born for the work. Never had a thought in his life above shoeing a horse, I'll be bound."

Jack's face flushed. He recalled Ned Holton's words, and he fancied the Squire was thinking the same thing. For the moment he almost envied Jake his coarse, burly propor-

tions. The next, he laughed pleasantly and said: "Yes; Jake is a typical blacksmith. When I see him, I always recall Longfellow's poem of the 'Village Smithy.' He looks as if he might have stood for the picture."

"So you read Longfellow, do you?"

It was the young man who asked this question. The quizzical glance which accompanied the words nettled Jack for the instant. He quickly answered: "Yes, sir; and I enjoy him. My father always told me that, because a man was a blacksmith was no reason why he should not be a gentleman, and a scholar, too, if he wished. He taught me to read Virgil as well as to shoe horses. Perhaps you think the two do not go well together."

"If such a thought was in my mind, I recant," the young man said. His tone was apologetic. He saw he had wounded the lad. "I see no reason why you should not read Longfellow and Virgil, if you choose. Such reading evidently has not kept you from becoming an expert at your trade. I confess it is not common to connect the two, but I can

see no possible objection, if your tastes lead you to do so."

Jack made no reply. He was distinctly ruffled by what had passed. He continued his work in silence. The Squire again spoke: "What is Jake Brown doing now? What became of his shop at Farwell?"

Jack hesitated a moment before he replied: "A man by the name of Hicks has the shop. Jake is not doing anything just now. He's anxious to get this stand, for he knows it is the best one in the county."

"Well, if he gets it, Payton will have a good smith to attend to his work. The new owner is a rusher, and he's going to make people open their eyes when he comes. I wish you were a few years older, Jack, there would be a better chance for you. You are rather young to have sole charge of such an important shop as this."

The Squire looked kindly into the lad's face as he spoke. Jack smiled back at him cheerily. There was something about Squire Tanner which affected people much as a gleam of sunshine brightens one on a cloudy day.

"Well, sir, time will remedy that defect. This can't be said of everything or of every person," was the lad's reply.

"Why not?"

It was the young man who asked this question, and his keen eyes looked the boy over from head to foot, as he awaited his answer.

"Because, if a fellow drinks and gambles, and contracts other bad habits, time, instead of remedying these evils, is pretty sure to increase them."

"That's true," laughed the Squire. "Well, your father's son could hardly be guilty of bad habits. I'm glad time is your friend, Jack, and I hope he will bring you success and fortune."

"Thank you, sir," was the boy's answer, given with a beaming face.

He had found that some other little finishing touches were needed to make the shoeing of the horse complete, besides the removal and replacing of the defective nail. He now announced the work finished.

As the young stranger paid for the job, he

said, with a kind glance into the boy's face: "That shoe is well put on. Silverheels was never so well-behaved before while being shod. When I see Payton I'll speak a good word for you. But don't count on him; he's a queer fellow."

Off they rode, and Jack quickly prepared to follow.

CHAPTER IV.

“NOT much use in going now,” Jack said, after he had washed, removed his apron and put out the fire. “But I’ll not give it up. Mr. Payton may be late as well as I, and, anyhow, I shall feel better to be on the move.”

It was a lovely day in autumn. Jack had an eye for beauty, and as he trudged along the highway he noted, with keen delight, the deepening tints of the forests.

“Not much frost yet, but the woods grow lovelier every day,” he said, aloud.

He had been walking for some time, and with great rapidity. He drew off his coat, threw it over his arm, and went on.

“Who ye talkin’ to, youngster?”

The voice proceeded from a clump of bushes by the roadside. The lad started, and glanced sharply around.

A red-faced, burly fellow of some twenty-five years sat on a stump grinning at him.

“Good morning, Mr. Brown,” said Jack,

coolly, as he perceived who had addressed him.

“My! how werry perlite he air. Too fine a dandy for shoein’ hosses. I say, Bub, whar ye goin’ in sich a hurry?”

“About my own affairs,” curtly replied Jack.

“Oh, ho! so he’s not all perliteness, arter all, air he? Might I ax, air ye a-goin’ ter the cross-roads ter meet the young boss? Ef ye air, ye may save yerself the trouble; he’s done gone, and the shop air mine.”

Jack winced, but said, quickly: “How long since he passed?”

“’Bout two hours. He comed airly. I done a good part by ye, Jack. I told him ’bout ye; but he ’lowed he didn’t want no boy ter hev charge o’ the hoss-shoein’ on his plantation; so the shop air gin ter me, an’ ye mought ez well turn about an’ go home.”

“I wouldn’t believe you on oath, Jake Brown, so I’ll not trouble to turn back until I’ve gone where I started for,” Jack replied.

“Jis ez ye choose; but ye better save yer shoe-leather; hit’ll be a good spell afore ye gits

another pair, ef ye depends on shoein' hosses at Black's Corner ter git money ter buy 'em with; but p'rhaps ye've hed a windfall, an' air now a-strikin' fur somethin' higher'n shoein' hosses. Ye looks for all the world, Bub, like a dudee; ye does, sho'. Ho! ho! ho!"

The man's coarse laughter stirred Jack's heart stormily, but he went on without replying.

"Ef ye should run up wi' the new boss, tell him I'll be on hand ter open the shop airly in the mawnin.' So, ye move out. D'ye hear? I'll be there, sho'."

The lad walked on in silence. His thoughts were not enviable ones. It was possible the man told the truth.

A boy whom Jack knew soon came from the direction of the cross-roads. Jack hailed him.

"Just from the cross-roads, Tom?" he asked.

"Yas; been thar sence daylight. Dad wuz ter hev come on with a cow, an' I wuz ter help turn her down our way. But he haint got along. I's jis walkin' on ter meet him. Seed anythin' o' him ez ye comed along?"

Jack answered in the negative, and then said :
“ Did you notice Jake Brown at the cross-roads
this morning ? ”

“ Yas ; he ware at the tavern fur quite a spell,
drinkin' beer, and crackin' jokes, and swearin'
He air a bad man.”

“ Did you see him talking to any stranger ? ”
questioned Jack.

He was anxious to see how much truth there
had been in Jake's statement about his having
met the young landlord.

“ 'Deed I did. A han'sum young chap, but
pow'ful weeked. He ware talkin' agin the
Bible, and Jake he agreed in every word he
said. Dunno how folks dares talk in sich a
way.”

“ It certainly is disgusting,” Jack said.

“ So hit air, sho ! God hed the Bible writ
hisself, so in cose hit's true. Schoolin' hain't
allus a blessin', ez dad 'lows, fur this young
gent hed larnin', plenty o' hit, but he air the
weeckedest pusson I ever hearn talk. He
swore wuss'n Jake. Hit 'jis made me mad ter
hear 'em, an' I comed out'n the tavern an'

waited on the big road fur dad an' the cow. Dad 'lows hits like eaten' pizen ter listen ter sich folks talk."

"Your father is right, Tom," was his listener's prompt answer. "My father taught me the same thing. He loved the Bible, and the one he used to read in is lying on a little shelf in the shop now. He always kept it out there 'to lunch on,' as he said. He read out of mother's at prayers. It hurts me to hear any one speak against God's book. I'm sorry the young landlord is that kind of a man. I'm not surprised to hear it about Jake, though."

"Naw; he's a no 'count feller, sho'. But folks sets store by him, 'cause he air full o' jokes, an' he air a proper good blacksmith, dad 'lows. Goin' ter the tavern?"

Jack had started on down the road. He turned and answered: "Yes; I have an errand there, and I'll go on. Had the young stranger left before you came away, Tom?"

The mountain lad scratched his head and pondered. "I forgot ter notice," he replied, at last. "Jake Brown air gone, I know, 'cause he

twitted me 'bout my red har ez he passed me. The stranger may be at the tavern yit ; I dunno. Lots o' people air thar ter-day."

"Much obliged. I hope you'll get along all right with the cow when your father comes," said Jack, and walked on.

It must be confessed that his hopes were not very buoyant, yet he must not lose the possible chance of getting the shop.

"It's quite probable, after all, that Jake told the truth," he thought. "Such a man as Tom describes Mr. Payton to be would not hesitate to give the shop to Jake. Kindred spirits Well, I'm glad I belong to a different class. My father's son could hardly feel at home with such men."

He lifted his head with an air of pride, although his face looked troubled. "If I lose the shop, where in the world can I take Bess and Alice," he said, speaking aloud. No answer came, and he walked briskly on, still pondering the question. When he reached the cross-roads no stranger was visible. He went to the tavern. Several mountaineers were

there; and two stable-boys, whom Jack knew well, strolled up to the porch when they saw him. He asked them about the young landlord. All this property had belonged to Mr. Parker, and now passed into his nephew's hands.

"Naw; the young boss hain't been by. He was to hev cum, but he done missed somehow," was the answer he received.

"He's done gone another way," said a smart-looking young negro who had just come up. "He's at de hall now. Pete seed him ride in. Dar's big doin's down dar, dey say, ter welcome him—roast pig, an' turkey, an' possum, an' ice-cream, an' all sich. Wish't I b'longed on dat plantation."

In spite of his weariness and his feeling of discouragement, Jack could not restrain a laugh at the emphasis with which the boy ran over the viands prepared for the young master's welcome at the hall. It was rendered still more amusing by the comical manner in which he rolled his eyes as he mentioned each new delicacy. It rolled a burden from Jack's

heart to find that the stranger whom Tom Weaver had seen was not Mr. Payton. Further inquiries revealed the fact that this stranger was from a neighboring city, and was only passing through the country on a business trip.

“So, after all, Mr. Payton may be a good man, like his uncle,” Jack thought, a feeling of hope stealing into his heart. “It’s plain Jake Brown didn’t tell the truth. To-morrow I’ll go to the hall bright and early and make my application. It would hardly be the right thing to intrude upon him to-day, just as he is enjoying his fine dinner. I wonder how he likes the ‘possum.”

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning Jack was up betimes. He had told Bess of his plan to call at the hall, and she promised to give him an early breakfast. He had some little errands to attend to, so, long before the sun had peeped over the hill-tops, he was out, inhaling the fresh air, and trudging briskly towards the shop. It was some quarter of a mile from the cottage, and as he walked along he whistled merrily. Youth is ever buoyant, and a good night's rest had greatly revived Jack's spirits. "Father always said that God was especially watchful over orphans," he said, as he neared the shop. He had a habit of talking aloud when alone, about which Bess often teased him. His thoughts ran on, and he continued to utter them aloud. "I remember a promise in the Bible which he read to me not long before he died; and he marked it, too. I wonder if I could find it! I feel, some way, as if it would

help me to read it over." As he placed the key in the lock he again began to whistle. A familiar voice said:

"A whistlin' boy mos' ginerally thinks he hez a good time ahead. What's happened ter lift ye up so high this mawnin', Bub?"

Jack's start of surprise caused the speaker, who was no less a person than Jake Brown, to burst into a loud laugh.

"Ez skeery ez a gal," he said, derisively. "P'rhaps ye air a gal," he added, maliciously; "yer's high-steppin' enough to be one, sho'."

"If you will kindly tell me your business I shall be glad," Jack said, as he threw open the shop door.

"Sartenly. I's werry agreeable 'long thar. My biz'ness air told in few words. I's cum ter take possession an' open the shop fur the young boss."

Jack looked into the man's shrewd, laughing face in amazement. Could it be possible, after all, that he had seen Mr. Payton, and had really gotten the shop? Jake read the surprise and perplexity in the boy's face, and im-

mediately added: "Didn't I tell ye yisterday the shop ware mine?"

"Yes; and you told me something else," said Jack, quickly. "You said that you had met Mr. Payton at the cross-roads. I found this was not true. He did not pass by there at all, but went to the hall by another road. If you failed to tell me the truth in one thing, why should I believe you in the other?"

"Purty good reasonin', only ye got started wrong. I didn't tell ye I seed the boss at the tavern. I met him on t'other road, accidental, ez hit ware. I 'lowed to find him at the tavern, an' ware headed that a-way when he cotched up wi' me. I knowed who he ware, an' I axed him at onct about the shop. I done tolt ye yisterday what he said. The shop air mine."

There was a shrewd twinkle in the man's eyes which made Jack half disbelieve his words, yet how could he prove them false?

"When I hear from Mr. Payton's own lips that he has given the shop to you I'll give you possession," the lad said, at last.

“Now, Bub, don’t ye go ter tryin’ ter mek me mad, ’cause hit won’t pay nary cent. Ef yore willin’ ter go inter the shop ’long wi’ me, I’s willin’ ter take ye in. This air what I ware ’lowerin’ ter propose at fust, only ye has sich high ways ye put me out. I’s been a-studdyin’ ’bout ye, an’ I knows ye hev got nuthin’ ’ter live on, now the shop air gone.”

He paused for a moment, and furtively looked into his listener’s face. Then he continued: “Ez I said, I’s willin’ fur ye ter be my pardner ef ye wants ter be, but ye mus’ keep a civil tongue in yore head, sho’, or I’ll hev ter turn ye out.”

Jack gazed into the coarse face before him in mute surprise. Was it possible that he wronged Jake Brown, and that the man had a heart after all? Had he spoken the truth, and was the shop really gone? A great lump came into his throat. He walked to the door and looked out. The sun was just rising over the hills, and a great flood of light bathed valley and forest in a blaze of glory. But Jack had no thought for this now. His heart was saying

over and over, "Turned out! turned out! Where can I take Bess and Alice? Must we starve?"

Jake's voice broke in upon his thoughts: "Ef ye choose ter keep the cottage, ye kin. I kin board with ye, an' we kin go halves in all we meks. This air a good stand, an' hit's goin' ter be better than ever afore. Ther say ez how the new boss air goin' ter put fifty mo' head o' mule on the plantation fust thing. Thar'll be plenty o' work fur us both."

For a moment Jack felt stifled. The thought of Bess and Alice without a home, without food, almost broke him down.

"Suppose I refuse your offer," he said, at last.

"But ye won't," the man answered, in easy confidence; "yer not sich a fool."

"But if I should," Jack persisted.

"Then ye'd hev ter turn out'n this shop an' the house ter-day; yes, within two hours."

Jack knew the fellow to be a bully, and he did not doubt but that he meant just what he said. For a moment the boy wavered.

Then, like a flash, he recalled Tom Weaver's account of Jake's talk in the tavern. Could he permit such a man to become an inmate of their home? Could he expose Bess and Alice to the influence of such a being?

Jake, who was furtively watching him, saw that a terrible struggle was taking place in the boy's heart. He did not doubt for one moment what the final result would be, but he thought he would aid matters by baiting his hook a little more. He said, in a reflective tone: "Arter a while, when we hev made a nice little pile o' money, I mought draw out an' leave ye the shop ter yoreself. I's been wantin' ter go into hoss-tradin' down in Texas fur quite a spell, and when I gits somethin' ahead ter buy a few hosses with, I shall, mos' likely, start out. Ye could jine me in this, ef ye wanted ter, an' what, wi' the shop and the hoss-dealin', ye mought be rich in a few years."

Jack turned and looked the man intently in the face. What he there read of coarseness, cunning and greed helped to steady him.

And then, in an instant, over his mental

vision there flashed some words he had years ago learned from his mother's Bible. They ran thus: "Come ye out, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing."

He almost felt as if an audible voice had spoken the solemn words.

He walked straight to the little shelf where his father's Bible lay, and placed his hand upon its well-worn cover. The touch gave him strength. He then said, in a low, firm voice: "I utterly refuse your offer, Jake Brown. I don't know why you make it. If I have wronged you in believing you to be a bad, unprincipled man, I beg your pardon; but I cannot be your partner; I will starve first."

A flame of angry passion swept over Jake's face. He clenched his burly fists and said, between his teeth: "Hev a care, youngster, how ye talk. I could twist off yore neck ez easy ez I could bend my finger."

Just then steps were heard, and the next instant Bess stood in the shop door.

"I've waited and waited for you, Jack," she

cried, breathlessly, not noticing Jake's presence. "Breakfast is almost cold, and you'll be late in getting off."

"Where be ye goin'?" Jake quickly demanded, suspiciously taking a step towards Jack. A very devil looked out of his eyes as he fixed them upon the lad's firm countenance.

"That is my own affair," Jack calmly answered, going to his sister's side and placing his hand upon her shoulder.

"Run back, Bess, I'll be home in a minute," he said, in a low voice. "Don't wait, or Alice may try to follow you. The frost is melting, and she may get her feet wet and have croup to-night."

But something in Jake Brown's angry face and threatening air had frightened the girl. She clung to Jack and said, in a whisper: "Come home with me now; I don't want to leave you here with that man."

Before the lad could reply, horses' hoofs were heard, and Ned Holton, mounted on a trim-looking mule, drew rein before the shop door.

At sight of him Jake Brown, without further word, slunk out of the shop, and disappeared down the road.

"I've come ter take ye down ter the hall," Ned said to Jack, after he had greeted Bess. "I've hed a call ter work thar, an' I 'lowed I'd carry ye 'long. Ye kin talk over matters 'bout the shop with the young master this mawnin', 'fore other folks gits ahead o' ye."

Jack thanked him for his kind thought, and the mountaineer continued, with a friendly smile bestowed on Bess, who still lingered: "I seed the new owner las' evenin', an' I spoke a good word fur ye, Jack. He 'lowed he'd a good 'pinion o' ye hisself, from sumthin' he'd hearn 'bout ye; so I's kinder hopin' ye kin git the shop arter all. What ware Jake a-hangin' 'round here fur?"

"I'll tell you as we ride along," the boy answered. "I'll have to go to the house a minute before I can start. Will you mind waiting five minutes?"

"No; nur ten o' 'em, ef ye needs that long. This mule air young, an' she air spry, an' we

kin jog along fas' when we starts," Ned answered.

Jack only waited to snatch a mouthful of breakfast. He knew Ned must not be late in getting to his work.

CHAPTER VI.

AS briefly as possible, while they rode along, Jack narrated his two interviews with Jake Brown.

Ned listened until the lad ended, and then said: "Jake air wuss than I 'lowed he ware. Hit's true that he seed the young master, an' Mr. Payton ware pleased ter say that he looked like he ware a good smith, which he air; but Jake did not git the shop."

"And yet he said he would turn me out of it in less than two hours unless I would become his partner," Jack exclaimed. "His audacity is amazing."

"So hit air. Mr. Payton said he'd wait a spell afore he decided who he'd give the shop to. Jake air ter see him agin this arternoon. Thet's why I 'lowed ter git ye ter the hall this mawnin'. Mr. Payton told me 'bout Jake last evenin' when he engaged me to work. He axed what kind o' man he ware. I said nothin' agin him."

"That was right," said Jack, heartily.

"But I told him 'bout you, an' 'bout yore father, an' he 'lowed ye ware young ter run sich a big shop alone. Jake may git hit, an' agin he mayn't. Providence air a-watchin' an' I air hopin' he'll give the shop where hit rightly b'longs, an' that'll be ter yore father's son."

Jack's eyes said that he was hoping the same. His lips were silent. Ned soon continued: "Why did Jake propose for ye ter be his pardner, I wonder, afore the shop ware really his'n?"

Jack laughed. "Don't you see? If he could tell Mr. Payton when he sees him this afternoon that we were in partnership, he would be certain to get the shop. We are the only two who are applying for it. Jake is a sharp fellow."

"So he air, an' a bad one. Hit won't seem right fur sich a feller ter hev yore father's place, an' I don't b'leeve God air a-goin' ter let him git hit. Still he may. 'His ways air not ez our ways,' the good book says, an' Mr. Payton 'lowed ez Jake looked every inch a black-

smith. I could see he liked his build an' kinder doted on his big arms an' fists."

A sudden thought brightened the lad's face. "Perhaps if Mr. Payton considers me too young to run the shop, and if he gives it to Jake, he might be willing to give me work about the hall. I must get into something right away. I could soon learn to garden under you, Ned, and I'm sure you would be patient with me until I learned."

"'Deed I would, lad. I'll stan' by ye, Jack; ye may be sure o' that. Yore father ware the best man I ever knowed, an honest, God-fearin' Christian, an' his God air a-goin' ter tek care o' his children. I feels sho' o' this, specially sence I seen what a nice, kind young gentleman the new master air."

As Ned's mule was carrying double, their progress was rather slow. The distance from the shop to the hall was not over three miles, and Ned hoped he would reach there in time to begin his duties at the usual hour. Suddenly, as they were riding through a dense woodland, a stone went whizzing close to Jack's

head. Another swiftly followed. This one struck his shoulder with such force as to elicit a low exclamation of pain. A third came. The last was evidently aimed at the mule, and hit her upon her flank. She shied violently, and started upon a run. She was young, and for a few moments Ned had all he could do to keep his seat and regain control of the frightened animal. "Hold fast, Jack," he cried; "some dastard wants ter murder us, or else some bad boys air out, bent on mischief. Don't lose yore grip, lad."

No danger of this. Jack was accustomed to horses, and he could keep his seat like an Indian brave.

As they emerged from the forest and neared the hall, the mule, under her double burden, slackened her pace. Ned Holton said, with a glance sent back along the road: "I b'leeve Jake Brown sent them stones. I'm afeared thar's murder in that man's heart."

"I think you are right," Jack quietly responded. "I thought I saw him going into the woods ahead of us as we turned into the hol-

low. When he left the shop he came in this direction, I remember."

Ned rode thoughtfully forward. "I'm sorry he's got a grudge agin ye," he said, at last; "he air a weecked man, an' I 'low he thinks thar's leetle chance fur him ter git the shop now. He knows I stan' yore friend, an' he reckons I kin influence Mr. Payton ter giv ye the stand. I don't b'leeve he will even go ter see Mr. Payton this arternoon. He'll be fearin' thet ye'll hev tolt him 'bout his lyin' ter ye; an' these stuns he jis' throwed will mek him skeery 'bout showin' hisself."

Jack was busy with his own thoughts, and made no reply. Ned continued: "Ye'll hev ter be cautious, Jack. An enemy like Jake, wi' murder in his heart, ain't a pleasant pusson ter hev about."

The lad laughed. "There's no danger. The stone did hit pretty hard, and he aimed at my head, but no harm is done. Jake's anger won't last; and my father's God, about whom you spoke a while ago, will take care of me. I'm trusting him, and I'm going to trust him as

I have never done before. I feel just as though he spoke to me this morning in the shop. It was like a real voice, telling me not to be Jake's partner; and somehow I feel, right now, as if he was all about me, watching over me."

"An' so he air; nary doubt o' that. Hit's a good feelin' ter have, hain't hit, lad?"

"Indeed it is. I wonder how any one can hate him or doubt his love," was Jack's hearty response. Then he added, after a moment's pause: "But I believe I am only just beginning to really love him myself. I've always known that he cared for me, for father and mother taught us this, but I now seem to fully understand that he *loves me*. I don't believe I shall be afraid again of not being able to provide for Alice and Bessie. He will take care of that."

Ned turned a beaming face sideways towards the lad. He could not look directly into his eyes, as he desired, but he came as near this as their respective positions upon the back of the still restive mule would permit.

"Now you're talkin' sense," he said, heartily.

“Hit’s when we trusts him that God kin bless us. Never forgit that, Jack.”

“I never thought much about it before, but I now see it must be an insult to him not to trust him. His book is full of promises.”

“Aye! so hit air,” agreed Ned.

“Father used to read them over and over, and say he was richer than a king, for every promise was for him. I believe I begin to know how he felt when he used to be so happy and sing so much while he worked.”

There was a glow in Jack’s face that said more than his words.

They had now reached the hall. “I’ll jis’ tie my mule an’ then go in with ye ter see the master. Hit air a bit late, but he’ll not mind me beginnin’ a few minutes behind time for onct.”

“No, Ned; go straight to work. I’m very much obliged to you for bringing me over. Now let me find Mr. Payton as best I can. Probably he is still at breakfast, and I may have to wait for him.”

“That’s true. Wal, when you hev seed him,

come out ter the garden where I's workin' an' tell me what he says ter ye. But I feel purty sho' now that he'll give ye the shop. Somehow I feels hit in my bones, ez my old granny used ter feel the rheumaticks before hit ware a-goin ter rain. An' she ware never mistook. Her bones allus telled the truth."

Ned lingered a moment to remove the saddle from his beast and tether her in such a manner as would permit her to graze on the luxuriant grass which the late autumn weather had left uninjured. Jack also lingered, feeling sure that Mr. Payton would not be ready to receive a caller at so early an hour. "Perhaps he's not up yet," he thought, with an amused smile. Had he known the prompt business habits of the young owner of all these rich possessions this thought would not have entered his mind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE "hall" was the ancestral home of the Parkers. It was a large, roomy structure, pleasing and picturesque in its quaint style of architecture.

An outside view gave one the impression that it must be full of cosy nooks, sunny exposures, and charming outlooks.

Jack surveyed the building with pleased attention as he advanced toward the massive front door.

"I may have trouble in being admitted," he thought. "But I'm going to see Mr. Payton if I have to wait here all day, and force an entrance at last."

A supercilious negro came to the door in answer to his ring. He looked Jack over, and said, after the lad had modestly stated his request to see Mr. Payton: "He's at his breffus; cayn't be 'sturbed, nohow."

"I'll wait for him, then," was Jack's reply,

turning towards an easy rustic chair which stood upon the piazza.

“No use to do dat,” the man quickly responded. “Dis day is to be giv’ up to biz’ness. Mr. Payton’s lawyer am wid him now, a-takin’ breffus. W’en dey finish eatin’, dey is goin’ into de study, an’ *no one* mus’ ’sturb ’em. Dese am de yong master’s own orders.”

“But I will only detain him a few moments,” urged Jack.

“Dat meks no dif’rence. He won’t see no pusson, ’cept he lawyer, ’fo to-morrow. Yo’ go ’long, an’ cum back in de mawnin’, ef yo’ biz’ness won’t keep no longer.”

He closed the door. Jack quietly seated himself in the rustic chair.

“I’ll wait an hour, and then I’ll ring again,” he said to himself.

The cleft in his strongly-moulded chin told of resolution and strength of character. The curve of his lips, as he spoke these words just above his breath, told the same story.

Very quietly he awaited the expiration of his allotted time. His thoughts were busy over

many things. He vaguely wondered if the young heir resembled his uncle, the Mr. Parker who had been so kind to every one around him. Then he found his mind recalling Tom Weaver, and repeating the lad's description of the young stranger whom both had felt sure was Mr. Payton.

"Oh! how glad I am that such a wicked man was not the young landlord. I don't believe I should want the shop if such a person as he owned it. I should feel afraid that God could not bless anything that belonged to him," he murmured.

Here his mind turned to his father's death-bed, and again he saw the dear face illumined with a great joy as the faint voice whispered: "All is peace, peace. Christ makes the dark valley bright with his presence."

"That is the way I want to die," Jack muttered, hastily brushing his hand across his eyes. Then he arose, walked once or twice across the piazza to stretch his limbs, and again rang the bell. The same servant who had before obeyed the summons again appeared.

He frowned when he saw who the visitor was, and said: "I done tolt yo' onct that the master cayn't be 'sturbed. Wat foh yo' keep on troublin' me?"

"It is very important that I should see Mr. Payton this morning. Please say to him"—but the man interrupted him, saying, rudely: "'Taint no manner o' use ter ax foh him to-day. He ain't gwine ter see no one. Dese am his own words. So, go 'long wid yo'."

He attempted to close the door as he finished speaking. Jack stepped boldly in, and quietly said: "I am going to see Mr. Payton *now*. If you do not choose to tell me where he is, I will find him myself."

Just then a bell sounded. The man muttered, sulkily: "He'll drive yo' out, sarten. His order wuz on no 'count ter 'low him ter be 'sturbed; an' he got a temper, sho'. Yo' better stay heah, an' lemme ax him 'bout yo'."

"No; I'll follow you," was Jack's reply. His blood was up, and he was determined to end the matter then and there.

The man, mumbling some inaudible words,

walked down the spacious hall. Jack kept close beside him. He threw open a door, and said: "Heah, sah, am a"—

He got no further. Jack had quickly stepped inside the door.

What was the lad's surprise to see Squire Tanner seated by a table in the centre of the room. By him sat the young man whose horse Jack had shod the day previous. A pile of written documents lay on the table before him.

Both men glanced sharply up at the sound of Jack's steps and the unfinished sentence of the servant. The expression of irritation upon the younger man's face changed to a smile as he recognized who the intruder was.

"I thought—I meant—I wanted to see Mr. Payton," the lad stammered in confusion at the unexpected meeting.

"Yes; I am that individual, at your service," the young man responded, evidently enjoying Jack's surprise. "What can I do for you?"

The boy partially recovered himself. Then, in a few simple words, he made known his request.

"The shop is yours," was Mr. Payton's brief reply. Then, seeing the lad was, for the moment, too deeply moved to reply, he added: "My name is Jack, the same as yours. It gives me pleasure to know that this name, which is an honored one in my family, finds no unworthy representative in you."

The lad was still mute, but the young man read a question in the eloquent eyes fixed so earnestly upon his own. He smiled. "I see you are wondering why I say this and why I so readily give you the shop. The explanation is easy. The setting of that last nail in Silverheels' shoe decided the matter in your favor. It was but a little thing, but small things mean great things sometimes. I saw that the nail was wrong, and I also saw that you knew it, before you spoke a word. Had you allowed it to remain, as you were tempted to do, Jake Brown would have been given the shop."

Jack murmured some words intended for thanks. The young man, still regarding him with that kind smile which made his face appear to the lad as the noblest he had ever seen,

continued: "I want good and honest work done. I will encourage no one who does any other kind. I am busy this morning, Jack, so I will not detain you any longer. Go back to work. So long as you are faithful, count on me as being your friend."

He extended his hand to Jack while speaking the last words. As the lad felt the warm pressure of the strong, firm hand, a great wave of boyish love and admiration went out from his heart towards this young man, whose sudden possession of great wealth did not cause him to forget to be kind and courteous to this humble young blacksmith. As he left the room the Squire called after him: "Be as good and honest a man as your father was, Jack, and you will never lack friends."

The lad turned a beaming face upon the jovial Squire as he answered: "I'll try to be that, sir, with God's help."

He found his way to the garden, and told Ned, in few words, of his good fortune. The simple-hearted mountaineer looked the embodiment of joy as he listened. "Wi' the young

master and Squire Tanner fur yore friends, lad, yore future air fixed," he said, in an exultant tone. "Ye'll mek enough ter give the gals ez good an eddication ez they kin want, besides supportin' them an' yo'self comfortable. This air a good day to me, Jack. I feels jis' like shoutin' hallelujah."

With a happy laugh the boy turned to go.

"Ye better stay 'till night, an' ride home 'long wi' me. Jake Brown may be a-hangin' 'round ter hurt ye," Ned said, anxiously.

But Jack only laughed at the good man's fears and trudged away.

"Just to think," he murmured, glancing back towards the stately pile of buildings, "if I had allowed that bad nail to remain in the mare's shoe I should have lost the shop. What is it father used to quote so often? Yes, I remember: 'Whosoever is faithful over a few things will also be faithful over much.' I'm going to live just as he did. It pays."

CHAPTER VIII.

AS blithe as a bird was Jack as he wended his way homeward. Although he had laughed at Ned Holton's fears that Jake might still be lingering in the forest, waiting to molest the lad on his way home, he still kept a sharp lookout as he went along. As he neared the hollow from whence the stones had been hurled but a few hours previous, his alert eyes kept close watch upon the roadside and the forest. But no one was visible, and no attempt was made to molest him. "Jake was in a rage this morning because I would not fall into his trap," he thought; "but it won't last. Probably he's heartily ashamed of himself long before this, and will hate ever to look into my face again. I'm sorry for him. He looks like a great animal without any soul. Whatever he had in that line he must have crushed out long ago, to judge from his present appearance." With these reflections he dismissed the burly blacksmith from his mind and went to whistling.

His heart felt so light that his joy must have vent in some way, and whistling was the natural escape-valve for Jack, as it is with most boys when the spirits become exuberant.

Perhaps the lad's idea that Jake's rage had spent itself might have changed had he looked behind him just before he reached home. An evil face peered out from behind a clump of low-growing evergreens, and a burly fist was shaken after the boy's retreating figure, while a low voice hissed: "Yer mighty contented jis' now, youngster. Yer whistlin' tells the story. I 'lowed ez much. The shop air yourn, wi'out er doubt, an' yer feelin' mighty good 'bout hit; but jis' wait a bit, an' see how ye feel when I's done wi' ye."

Bess and Alice gave the lad a warm greeting when he reached the cottage. Great was Bessie's delight to find that the shop was really given to Jack. She had always supposed that this would be the case, yet she had dimly felt that there was a possibility that it might be otherwise disposed of. To add to her joy, her brother laid various small packages upon the

kitchen table. An examination proved that these contained rice, sugar, raisins, and various other articles for which the young housekeeper had long been asking. Jack had gone some half a mile out of his way to purchase them, having visited a small grocery store not far from the hall, situated upon another road from the one on which they lived.

“Now you shall have a nice pudding for dinner, Jack, and Alice shall have some of her favorite cookies. How glad I am that Mr. Payton has come, and that all the tiresome waiting is over,” the girl cried, with bright eyes, as she hastened around to prepare her tempting meal.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten dinner which the three orphans enjoyed that day. All the gloom was gone from Jack's brow; his voice and smile were so cheery that Alice said, joyfully: “Papa's tumin' home to-day, isn't he, bubbah? Is you seen him tumin' makes you laugh so?”

A quick hush fell over her sister and brother. They had never explained to her the meaning

of their father's absence. A kind neighbor had taken her to her home during the last few days of Mr. Asbury's illness, and the child had seen and known nothing of the ghastliness of death. Both Jack and Bess had felt it impossible to tell her the truth when she was brought back to them. The former now said, very gravely and softly: "Papa has gone to live with Jesus and the angels, Alice, in a beautiful country called heaven. He will never come back to us here, but we shall go to live with him after a while if we try to do right and if we love God."

"Me loves Dod. Me dood baby. Tan't I doe see papa to-day?" the child said, eagerly.

Very tenderly Jack tried to explain the truth to the little one, and Bess, with tears rolling down her cheeks, added a few words from time to time.

"You know father always read in the Bible and prayed with us, Alice, at night before he went away," Jack said, at last. "I think he would be glad for us still to do this. I'm going to begin to-night, and read just where he left off. His mark is in the Bible, just as he left it.

Then we'll all kneel down and say the Lord's prayer together. I believe this will please father, and I think it will please God, too. How will you like this? "

The idea pleased her, and Bess said: "And we can all repeat the twenty-third Psalm together. You know mamma taught us this Psalm. I shall almost feel as if she and papa were with us if we can have prayers again. Won't it be nice, Alice? "

"Es. An' me tan say, 'Now I lay me' out here wiv bubbah, 'sted o' sayin' it in ze bed-room," the baby said, contentedly.

It seemed a very desolate way for these three children thus to live by themselves, with no housekeeper but Bess; but they really got along very comfortably. Bess was an active, tidy girl, and her mother had carefully trained her in all the mysteries of cooking and house-keeping, until she was as expert in her sphere as Jack was in his. The dear mother had only slept beneath the willows one short year when Mr. Asbury joined her. A kind neighbor baked bread for the little household twice a week, in

spite of Bessie's protest that she herself was able to do this. The more troublesome pieces of the weekly washing were also attended to by this good woman, and Bess repaid her by often going over with Alice and amusing the children, so that the busy mother could be free to attend to her numerous duties.

That evening, just before the lamps were lighted, Jack went out to the shop. He had not opened it since his return from the hall, but had spent the afternoon at the cottage with his sisters.

"I'll begin work bright and early to-morrow morning," he said, as he walked briskly along in the gloaming. "And I must see Dan, and tell him to be on hand regularly after this. I must prove to Mr. Payton that his confidence in me is not misplaced, and no doubt there will now be plenty of work to keep Dan and me both busy."

When he reached the shop and unlocked the door, he went to the shelf where his father's Bible lay, and took it down.

"This one is all marked with father's pencil, and I like it best," he thought, carefully tuck-

ing it under his arm. "I can fancy I see father poring over it whenever I look at it. That passage about God being a Father to the fatherless is carefully marked in this, and I want to find it. Father read it to me, and marked it, the very last day he was able to come out to the shop and work."

As he was stepping out of the door, a dark form came around the end of the shop. At sight of Jack the figure turned hastily away, and disappeared in the shadows.

Jack's heart beat more quickly than usual.

"That was Jake Brown. What is he hanging around here for, I wonder? And what made him hurry off as if he was afraid of being seen?"

There was no one to answer these questions which came into the lad's heart. He carefully locked the door, looked sharply in the direction in which the figure had disappeared, and then thoughtfully returned to the cottage. He felt uneasy, but he knew he must not betray this feeling to Bess.

It would have been a touching sight, had

there been any one to observe them, to see the three orphan children gather together that night in family worship.

Jack read aloud from the holy word, and then they reverently knelt by their chairs to invoke, as best they knew how, God's love and care over them.

The "Shepherd Psalm" was then duly recited, and this was followed by Alice repeating, in soft tones, her usual little prayer before she kissed Jack good-night.

Very peacefully the two girls fell asleep that night. An overshadowing presence seemed to Bessie to hover about them. She whispered to her little sister, as she took her into her arms: "God is surely with us to-night, Alice. I love him so much. Don't you love him, pet?"

"Es me do," the little one drowsily murmured, and the next moment she was fast asleep. Bess soon followed her into the land of dreams, and silence brooded over the little household.

Jack, alone, was restless. He could not forget the huge, slouching form which he had

seen about the shop, nor could he dismiss the feeling of uneasiness which the remembrance brought him.

He recalled Ned Holton's words, and the fear which the good man had expressed that Jake might try to wreak some injury upon the lad.

Although, at the time, Jack had laughed at his words, he now remembered them with something akin to fear. And yet, what could the brawny fellow do? Evidently he had not intended any personal violence, else he would have perpetrated it out at the shop that evening. Instead, he had hurried from view, as if ashamed of being seen.

For a time this thought comforted the boy, and he fell into a light sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THE night was dark. Not a star was visible. Heavy clouds veiled the sky, and the wind sighed and moaned, as it sometimes will in autumn, seeming to complain that the summer was gone.

Jack soon wakened, and again tossed restlessly upon his pillow. Once he arose and peered out through the gloom towards the shop. All was silence and darkness.

“Pshaw! I wonder why I can’t forget Jake Brown?” he muttered, in disgust at his inability to sleep. “The fellow was on his way home, no doubt, from his interview with Mr. Payton. The reason he slouched off so quickly when he found I was in the shop was because he felt ashamed to face me after his wicked words this morning, and his silly rage in throwing the stones.”

Somewhat reassured by these reflections he turned his face away from the window and again fell into an uneasy slumber. But frightful

dreams invaded his sleep. A nameless horror seemed to have possession of him.

He again arose and looked out of the window. Nothing but dense darkness greeted him.

"I wonder what ails me?" he said, half aloud, and giving himself a vigorous pinch to see that he was fully awake. "I don't think I ever had such a feeling of dread before. Perhaps Jake was right after all, and I am a girl. I seem to be as nervous as one to-night."

He laughed softly at the idea of there being anything feminine in his make-up. He was such a full-blooded, typical boy, that the thought was amusing.

"I'll get a drink of water from the pitcher, and then I *will* go to sleep," he thought. He helped himself to the water.

He stumbled over a chair in the darkness, and knocked his nose against a corner of the mantle-shelf, as he fumbled his way back to the bed.

Much disgusted, he settled himself upon his pillow, and closed his eyes; but vain were his attempts to sleep.

At last, in sheer desperation, he again arose. This time he sank upon his knees by the bedside, and whispered: "Dear Father in heaven, if anybody is wanting to harm us, please watch over us and keep us in safety. You have promised to be a Father to the fatherless, and we are trusting you to take care of us. We have no one else to trust. Please hear me, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

When he arose he felt strangely comforted. He softly struck a match to see what time it was. He always slept with his father's old silver watch under his pillow.

"Just twelve o'clock, and I came to bed at nine. Well, I'm sleepy now, sure enough, and I feel as if I could sleep like a top until morning."

He crept into bed and was soon sound asleep.

The dark figure of a man at this moment was standing immediately under the window. Both hands were full of shavings. He muttered an oath as he saw the flash of the light from Jack's match.

“Wonder ef he air a-suspicionin’ anything?” he breathed. “Hit pears like hit. Anyhow, some o’ ’em air awake. Wal, hit do pear rather tough ter burn the house with the leetle gals in hit. The boy mought burn, fast enough, fur all o’ me carin’, but the baby an’ the gal air likely critters. Don’t b’leeve, arter all, I kin fire the cottage. Thet flash o’ light sort o’ set me tremblin’, an’ set me studdyin’ ’bout the leetle gals.”

He swiftly gave an upward glance towards the window from whence the light had appeared, and then softly turned away, muttering just above his breath: “But the shop shell go, an’ thet will spile all his fine plannin’. He cayn’t shoe hosses wi’out a shop, an’ wi’ nary thing to shoe ’em with. Ho! ho! my fine dudee, yer bread’s all dough, ez ye’ll find out afore long.”

Jack may have slept soundly for some two hours. He never knew what aroused him. He opened his eyes with a violent start.

The room was in a glow of light.

He rubbed his eyes to be certain that he was

awake. A blaze of red light streamed in through his window, revealing to his startled gaze the most minute object in the room.

He sprang up with a low cry, and rushed to the window. A solid sheet of flame was rising from the shop.

"Oh! some one has fired the shop! Jake Brown must have done it. And it's too late to save a thing," he moaned. "We are ruined! we are ruined!"

He hastily threw on some clothing and ran swiftly down stairs. He made no noise, and as he unlocked the door and sped out he left it unlatched. "No use to frighten Alice and Bess," he thought; "they might as well sleep as long as they can. It will be hard enough for them to bear the truth when morning comes. No one can help now; it's too late. It must have been burning an hour. Oh! why didn't I lie awake and watch! I felt that something dreadful was going to happen."

It was true that nothing could be saved. Even as he rushed out, the roof of the shop fell in, and the flames leaped up towards the black

sky as if in fiendish glee over the ruin they had wrought.

“Yes; this is Jake Brown’s work,” Jack muttered. “No doubt he’s far enough away, though, by this time. Oh! what will become of us; what will become of us?” he moaned, going as close to the leaping flames as he dared, and unconsciously wringing his hands, as his mind fully grasped what the destruction of the shop really meant to him.

A huge form, which was crouched down behind a clump of dense evergreens, where the same figure had been concealed the previous morning as Jack returned from the hall, chuckled as he watched the lad’s evident distress. “Oh, ho!” he whispered, “so yer whistlin’ air changed ter sumthin’ else, be hit? Wal, thet’s the purtiest sight I ha’ seen fur many a day an’ night. I meant ter a-fired the house, but this air enough. Guess he’d be mighty glad ter be my pardner jis’ about now ef he hed a chance. Good-bye, youngster; my grudge agin ye air about gone out wi’ the burnin’ o’ the shop. I ha’ settled ye fur

a while, an' thet's comfortin'." He peered through the low-growing bushes, and again chuckled as he saw the despairing face and attitude of the stricken boy. Then he added, turning away: "Now I air off fur Texas. Don't keer to stay 'bout here arter ter-night. Hit's mighty convenient ter git off wi' the hoss-traders 'fore daylight. Somebody mought be a-axin 'bout my health, an' I jis' ez leeve ez not be out'n the way." He started to creep cautiously through the bushes away from the burning building, when a thought suddenly struck him. Again he chuckled and whispered: "The werry thing; I'll do hit. No harm'll come, an' hit'll mek him dance. Ho, ho!" So loud was his sinister merriment that, had there been a listening ear, and had it not been for the roaring and crackling of the fire, it must have been heard. He cautiously made a wide circuit about the flaming shop and came out close to the cottage. He paused a moment and peered towards the fire. Jack still stood where he had first stopped when he reached the scene of ruin, lost in painful thought. The

figure stole noiselessly towards the house and disappeared within its shadow. Ten minutes later the same figure emerged and struck into the forest on the opposite side from where the shop had stood. He bore a dark bundle in his arms, which he held with much care, and his steps were cautiously chosen. After he had gotten some distance from the cottage and the burning building he swung into a rapid walk, which soon carried him far from the scene of his night's exploit. This was the last which that vicinity ever saw of Jake Brown.

Jack stood and watched the flames gradually die away. Not a soul besides himself and that other unseen watcher had noticed the fire. The shop and cottage stood near the edge of the forest, and no other buildings were in sight. Jack had the vigil all alone after that unsuspected and sinister figure had stolen away into the gloom and silence of the forest. It was a vigil he never forgot. "I'm glad I got father's Bible from the shop," he thought; "I can see him now bending over it, with his apron on and his sleeves rolled up, reading a passage now

and then as he worked. And to think the shop he loved so well, and the tools which he used for so many years, are gone."

It was not strange that tears rolled down the lad's cheeks. He hastily brushed them aside, as though in shame, and said: "We have no one to look to but God. He has promised to care for us, but I hardly see how he is going to do it, now that the shop is gone. But I suppose he will somehow, if we can trust him."

The early gray of the morning soon began to break the gloom of night. Anon the first faint flush of rose color tinted the east. Usually Jack was alert to catch the mystic charm of the dawn, but now his thoughts were too sad to care for this. He vaguely wondered who would be the first among the neighbors to see the ruin. He knew that just at dawn a lad always passed with a cart of fruit and vegetables going to the neighboring town to market. Probably he would be the first to discover the loss. "I must soon go in," he thought; "Bess will be up, and I must break the news to her carefully. Alice must not be frightened."

CHAPTER X.

THE news that the blacksmith shop at Black's Corner was burned ran through the neighborhood like an electric shock.

A passing lad, soon after daybreak, discovered it. He made it his business to spread the news. When it was told to Ned Holton, he shook his head gravely, and said to himself: "That air Jake Brown's doin's. I knowed he ware bad, but I didn't 'low he ware ez low down an' sneakin' ez that."

He hastened to the cottage before he went to his work at the hall.

He never forgot the scene which met his eyes after he drew rein in front of the house where the orphans lived. He did not pause as he passed the smoking pile of ruins where the shop had so recently stood. He only groaned aloud, and said, as he rode past to the cottage: "Jack air sorely tried; but I air plumb thankful that no harm ware done ter him er the leetle gals. Jake mought a-burned the cottage. He

air weecked enough ter do anythin' 'cordin' ter my notions."

The sound of weeping met his ears as he ascended the piazza steps.

"Pore Bessie, she air takin' on dretful; an' no wonder," he thought.

But he was not prepared for the spectacle of grief which met him as he opened the door and entered. His knock had not been heeded.

Poor Bessie, half clad and dishevelled, stood in the centre of the room wringing her hands and violently sobbing. No fire was in the grate, and no thought of preparing the morning meal seemed to have entered the poor girl's mind. Jack was by her side endeavoring to calm her. As Ned paused upon the threshold he heard him say: "Hush, Bess, and try to control yourself. Try and think whether she has ever walked in her sleep. It seems to me that I remember mother telling us about her having done this once or twice when she first learned to walk."

But Bess made no reply. Jack continued: "It is possible she got up in her sleep and went

out-of-doors, and we may find her fast asleep somewhere near the house."

A great fear came into Ned Holton's heart. He strode forward and said, as he laid his hand on Jack's shoulder: "Air the baby gone?"

The startled boy had not been aware of a third person's presence in the room until he felt the heavy grasp upon his arm. With a stifled cry he turned towards Ned and said: "Yes; the shop is burned and Alice is gone. We have searched the whole house, but she is not here."

"Come, thar's jis' one chance, she may hev runned out airly, 'fore Bess woke up. She may be a-playin' in the garden or the cow-shed. We mus' search fust, an' talk arterwards," was the mountaineer's reply.

The search proved unavailing. Neighbors now came pouring in, the news of the fire having been widely spread by those who love to be the first to carry tidings of disaster into quiet households. All hearts were interested in the orphans, and many now presented themselves,

who, had the loss fallen upon others, would not have noticed it.

Bess was as a person bereft of reason. She moaned out again and again: "She went to sleep, as she always does, lying in my arms. When I woke up this morning she was gone. I thought at first she was in Jack's room; but she is lost. Some one has stolen her, or she is burned up in the shop."

Many kind hearts tried to pacify the frantic girl, but little solace could be given. The disappearance of the beautiful child was a palpable fact, and there seemed no possible explanation that was less appalling than those Bessie had advanced.

A search for Jake Brown disclosed the fact that he was not to be found. No one knew where he was hidden. Even his best friends claimed to be ignorant of his whereabouts. Parties of men scoured the forest and highways in all directions. Unfortunately, both Mr. Payton and Squire Tanner had taken an early train for the city, so that their advice and counsel could not be obtained until night.

After the first horror of finding that Alice was gone was over, Jack had become calm and collected. He it was who organized party after party to search the woods and valleys for the missing child. He, taking only Ned Holton with him, went in the direction of the river. "Some Texas horse-traders left the valley this morning before daybreak," he said, as they strode forward, keeping a sharp lookout in every direction for any possible clue of the lost one. "Jim Green told me about them. They went in a boat down the river. I have an idea that Jake went with them. He told me yesterday that he wanted to go to Texas to engage in horse-trading."

Ned's interest in this disclosure was deep, although he made no response. Jack continued: "My idea is for us to go to the point where the traders started down the river. It's by Noel's ferry, Jim said, the loneliest place I know. Only an old woman and a half-witted boy live there. The ferry is no longer kept up. They are said to be hard cases, but if Jake went with the traders, as I believe he did, we

may find out from the woman whether he carried a child with him or not. He's mean and wicked, but I don't believe he's bad enough to hurt an innocent baby like Alice."

Jack's voice was husky. The possibility of harm having come to his little sister broke down his firmness.

"P'raps you air right," Ned said; "I air afearin'—" but he did not finish his sentence. His fears were such terrible ones that he felt he must not tell them to Jack.

Their inquiries at the ferry at first seemed fruitless. Not a word of information could be elicited from the hard-featured woman who occupied the shanty on the river bank. At last she said, peering sharply into Jack's face: "What air them thar hoss-traders ter ye? What fur ye want ter know all about 'em?"

The lad's heart was full. In a few hurried words he told of the fire and of the loss of his sister; also, why his suspicions fell upon Jake, and why he believed he had joined the traders.

"Ef I kin help ye find the chile, what'll ye

giv me?" the old crone said, with an avaricious gleam in her eyes.

Ned drew out a silver dollar, and Jack added another. "This is the last dollar I have in the world," the latter said; "I will gladly give it to you if you can help us find Alice."

"Giv 'em ter me," the old creature said. "I kin show ye the baby in one minnit ef I's a mind ter."

She eagerly clutched the money, and then opened the door leading into her miserable shanty. "Look! Air thet ther chile?" she said, pointing to a dirty bed in the corner of the room.

With a wildly-beating heart Jack went forward. Yes, there, upon the torn quilt, lay Alice. She was fast asleep. Tears were upon her lashes, and she sobbed in her slumber as they gazed upon her. Ned sternly faced the woman. "Ye shell suffer fur helpin' that scoundrel steal the chile. How dared ye do hit?"

"I didn't know the man," the old creature said, without flinching. "He tolt me the

baby's mammy had jis' died, an' he paid me a silver dollar ter keep her tell he cumed back fur her. He 'lowed he ware comin' in less than a week ter git her."

Jack had been vainly trying to awaken the child, but he could not succeed. "What have you given her to cause her to sleep so soundly?" he said, in a frightened tone.

"Nuthin' ter harm her; jis' a few draps o' par'goric. She cried so hard fur her mammy, Bessie she called her, thet I 'lowed she'd be sick, so I gin her a leetle drap o' the soothin' stuff. I givs hit ter Joe mos' every night when he can't sleep." She pointed, as she spoke, to a poor imbecile lad who sat mumbling to himself, crouched over the fire.

Ned wrapped the sleeping child with the blanket in which Jake Brown had muffled her the previous night when he stole her from the cottage, and he and Jack started homeward.

"The woman air bad, but I dunno ez she knowed the child ware stole; but she 'peared pow'ful glad, ter my mind, when we took her

away," Ned remarked, as they left the shanty and the river behind them.

"I doubt if she knew that Alice was stolen," Jack agreed; "but I do think she suspected that something was wrong. But the dollar Jake paid her quieted her conscience, if she has any."

The fresh air soon aroused the child from her heavy slumber. Her joy in seeing Jack walking along by her side, and the kind face of Ned Holton bending over her, can be imagined. She seemed to be perfectly well, and the few past hours, whatever they had held for her of pain and terror, were forgotten in her present happiness.

"God is good to give her back to us so soon, safe and unharmed, out of the power of Jake Brown and that old woman," Jack said, with deep emotion, as they neared the cottage.

"Yes; he air allus good ter sich ez trust an' obey him," was Ned's hearty response; "I ware pow'ful skeered fur a spell, but God ware better then my fears 'lowed. Sometimes he lets us fall inter sich trouble ez mos' breaks the heart jis' ter see ef we will still trust him. An'

then he sort o' wants us ter be weaned away from this world thet we may fix our hearts on 'tother one." The last words were spoken very low and in a voice that was slightly tremulous. The good man was glancing back over some things in his own life when crushing sorrow had first turned his eyes Godward and heavenward.

We need not pause to tell of Bessie's joy when the little one was laid in her arms, nor of the hearty sympathy and warm congratulations showered upon the little household by their kind-hearted neighbors. Busy hands had been at work in the various homes, and at nightfall a goodly store of wholesome and appetizing food was placed in Bessie's neat pantry.

When, at last, the brother and sisters were left alone, nothing but thankful joy filled their hearts. The loss of the shop was, for the time, forgotten in the happiness of having Alice safely with them once more. It was with deep gratitude that they knelt around the little family altar and thanked God for his goodness in bringing Alice again to their arms.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Ned Holton next saw Jack he said: "Jake Brown orter be made ter suffer fur his weeckedness. But thar haint no proof agin him, even ef we could ketch up wi' him."

"He'll suffer enough," was the lad's reply. "I wouldn't have his conscience to carry around with me for a million of dollars."

"I's a-fearin' his conscience air dead," Ned responded. "Ye know God does let the wilfully weecked 'follow ther own devices,' ez the good book says, an' the end o' all sich ez God once lets go his holt on air orful ter studdy about. Jake air one o' them ez God hez giv up, ter my thinkin'. P'raps I's wrong. I hopes I air, an' thet Jake's conscience will yit thrash him an' bring him ter repentance."

If such was the case, Ned never heard of it. It was soon learned, beyond a doubt, that the burly blacksmith had gone to Texas in company with the horse-traders, as Jack had surmised.

No one regretted his departure, unless it were a few of his boon companions who sometimes longed for his vile jokes and unclean witticisms.

“Whatever ye air ter do is mor’n I kin tell,” Ned said, looking Jack thoughtfully over from head to foot. “Hit stan’s ter reason ye cayn’t shoe hosses wi’ nary shop ter shoe ’em in, an’ nuthin’ to work with.”

“I’ve thought perhaps Mr. Payton will let me work with you at the hall until I can make some arrangements for another shop,” the lad quickly responded. “I’ve got to find something to do at once, for I gave that old woman at the ferry the last dollar I had left of the sum father had by him when he died.”

Jack’s voice was a trifle husky as he thus spoke. Ned cleared his throat with an energetic and thrice-repeated cough before he trusted himself to reply.

“Don’t ye mind ’bout that, lad. I’ve plenty o’ meal an’ sweet pertaters an’ bacon on hand, an’ ye an’ the children shan’t suffer whilst I’ve a mouthful by me. The missus is of the same

mind, fur we ware a-talkin' ye over when hit 'peared ez if Jake mought git the shop away from ye. So don't ye fret."

Jack answered, with much emotion: "I thank you, Ned, from my heart; but we can make out all right if Mr. Payton will give me work with you for a while at the hall; and I think he will. He seems to be very kind, and he was pleased to say that he felt an interest in me, because I managed to shoe his beautiful horse, Silverheels, to his and to her satisfaction. She was rather troublesome, and he liked the way I got along with her."

Jack's voice was as cheery as ever as he finished speaking. Ned heartily responded: "Aye; he spoke 'bout the shoein' o' her ter me. 'Lowed ye ware the best han' 'bout handlin' hosses he ever seen. Wal, I must be off. I lost the hull day yesterday, an' I must be on time this mawnin'. I'll see what Mr. Payton says 'bout givin' ye work at the hall, an' I'll come by ter-night an' let ye know."

Ned had a long conference with the young master that day, who expressed the liveliest in-

terest in Jack's misfortunes. The loss of the shop did not seem to trouble him.

"It was a tumble-down old place anyway," he said, lightly. "I almost feel like thanking the villain who fired it, if I could find him."

The mountaineer looked reproachfully into the young man's face as he responded: "But hit ware all that Jack hed ter work in. Now he air lift wi' nuthin' between him an' starvation, onless the neighbors helps him ter somethin'. He air hopin' ter git work at the hall, a-helpin' me in the garden. I promised ter ax ye 'bout hit."

"Does he know anything about gardening?" questioned Mr. Payton.

"I'm bound ter 'low thet he don't. All he knows is 'bout hosses; but he kin larn."

"No, I don't care to have you spend your time in teaching him something he doesn't care anything about. He would not follow gardening any longer than he was obliged to. His heart is set on his trade, and nothing else will satisfy him."

This was all that Ned could get him to say.

With a heavy heart he recounted his lack of success to Jack, as he passed by the cottage on his way home.

The lad received the news in silence. His face showed perplexity, but not discouragement.

Three months later Mr. Payton and his lawyer, Squire Tanner, were leisurely riding past Black's Corner.

"It's a different looking place than it was the first time you saw it, Payton, isn't it?" the Squire said, looking towards the well-built, substantial appearing shop which now occupied the spot left vacant by the fire.

"Yes; I've always felt profoundly grateful to the fellow who set the old rattle-trap on fire," the young man responded. "He meant mischief, but he was only doing Jack a kindness. That boy is the finest fellow I know. Since he got into the new shop, with all the improvements which I put in, he is as happy as a king. I envy him sometimes when I see him at work and hear his merry whistle. Hark! he's whistling now."

Sure enough, as they listened, a clear, sweet whistle was borne to their ears. Soon they came in view of the open shop door.

Jack stood by the fire holding something in the red blaze. His assistant, Dan, was placing a piece of iron upon the anvil. A number of conveyances of various kinds stood in front of the shop. Some of them showed a broken spring, others had a wheel off, each mutely testifying to the fact that the young blacksmith was not lacking work.

"When Jack found that I was going to build him a new shop," Mr. Payton continued, "he broke right down. I had kept him in suspense for a while. This was hard on him, perhaps, but I wanted to see what he would do. That boy has great strength of character. After he found I would not give him work at the hall, he hired out to break stone down on the turnpike among a lot of the roughest men in the valley."

"Plucky fellow," laughed the Squire; "I always liked Jack. He may yet be seen occupying the White House at Washington. There's no telling where such boys as he will stop."

“You’re right,” assented his companion ; “he’ll not be a blacksmith always. But while he is one he will do first-class work. He has pluck, principle and perseverance. I’m going to stand his friend, and when he is ready to step up higher I expect to lend him a hand. I consider it a privilege to help a fellow like Jack.”

From this conversation it will be seen that Jake Brown’s attempt to injure Jack Asbury had resulted in placing the lad in a better position than ever. Thus it ever is with those who *fully trust* God, verifying the truth of his word : “ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD to those who LOVE THE LORD, to those who are the CALLED ACCORDING to HIS PURPOSE.”

All are called “according to his purpose” who respond to his love, give their hearts to him, and strive to walk as he commands. To all such these words come as a song and shout of triumph and victory over all seeming ills and discouraging circumstances.

Jack is fond of saying to Bessie as they discuss the past and the present : “I’m so glad I

never lost heart, Bess, and never forgot to trust in father's God. It's true what the Bible says : 'Blessed are all they whose trust is in the Lord.' I hope father knows about us, and how happy we are."

"Of course he does," the girl makes answer with shining eyes. "Don't you suppose that God tells him about us? Father couldn't be happy unless he knew the Lord was answering his prayers. He died telling us that God would be a Father to us, and he is."

"So he is," Jack replies, and falls into a happy reverie. Sweet little Alice brings her book of Bible pictures which Mr. Payton has given her, and nestles close by Bessie's side. Truly they are a happy household.





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